SAINT FRANCIS de SALES

By Henri Bordeaux

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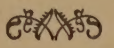
SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

Theologian of Love



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François de Sales Evesque et Prince de Geneve

Saint Francis de Sales

THEOLOGIAN OF LOVE

BY

HENRI BORDEAUX
OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

TRANSLATED BY

SISTER BENITA

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SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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To the Memory
of the
Last Priests of my Family

CANON FRECHET, CURÉ OF ANNECY
DIED AT ANNECY, FEAST OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES, 1900

REVEREND FATHER ALBERT DU SAINT-SAUVEUR
PRIOR OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES OF PARIS
DIED FEBRUARY 14, 1907, AT MARCHES, BELGIUM

MONSIGNOR DERUAZ, BISHOP OF FRIBOURG
DIED SEPTEMBER 26, 1911

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INTRODUCTION

BEFORE beginning this study of St Francis de Sales I have a confession to make. I shall endeavor to portray the aspect of St Francis' character that is most readily grasped by the average reader. I would look at him not as a missionary, nor a bishop, nor as the founder of the Order of the Visitation, nor as the theologian who wrote the Treatise on the Love of God, but as a man, a man influenced by heredity and by the environment of the particular district in France in which he was born, a man who was the better qualified to understand and advise others because of the very human quality of his virtues and his shortcomings — shortcomings of which he was more conscious than most. Let me here assure the reader that I do not undertake this study with any feeling that my own personal life qualifies me especially to do so; to the contrary, my shortcomings are probably very much the same as his. Therefore I freely confess that I do not feel competent to speak of St Francis as a saint. But doubtless — and the thought reassures me — wrapped up as he is in the hurly-burly of modern life, the reader himself is ill-prepared to follow a sustained discussion of saintliness. Thus before we proceed I assure him that my intentions are the best, and that I rely upon his charity for my shortcomings.

It was only after a great deal of hesitation, due to the

consciousness of my own limitations, that I allowed this book to appear. This is the third time I have taken St Francis de Sales as my subject. In the *Correspondant* on the tenth of March 1908, I published a comprehensive study on Madame de Charmoisy, the Philothea in "The Introduction to a Devout Life." That study, the last work read by a dying woman particularly dear to me, I wrote at her suggestion. It was my first contact with our Saint. Since then I have never given up the idea of dedicating to him a work of "commentaries." I returned to it again in 1912, when I gave a series of lectures at the Foyer. Then came the war, and it was not until ten years later that the project was brought to my mind once more by the request of the Bureau of Lectures that I assist in the public celebration of the third centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales.

Indeed, on December 20, 1622, three hundred years before, the bishop of a little mountain diocese had been dying far from home at Lyons, where he had been sent upon an apostolic mission. Immediately the whole Christian world as well as his own little world united for once to proclaim that a Saint had gone. Death, unexpected and premature, had supplied the finishing touch to a masterpiece that for fifty-five years had steadily been nearing completion, a masterpiece none the less remarkable for the almost total lack of incident, of striking or unusual events, in his life.

At first I felt no scruples in accepting the offer of the Bureau of Lectures. It even seemed to me in my naïveté (should not a confession be complete ?) that this subject

was mine by rights. Was not St Francis de Sales a compatriot of mine? I was born in a house which belonged to Madame de Charmoisy and in which the Bishop of Geneva and Madame de Chantal had been guests. In Savoy, St Francis de Sales is popular; his name is a household word. Even the little children know him and make pilgrimages to the fortress at Allinges where he sojourned and to the Chestnut tree at La Chavanne which he climbed to escape the wolves.

Moreover, I was well acquainted with his writings and twice had made a thorough study of his life and doctrines. Then, too, had not Madame de Chantal said of him: "He kept in the common way?" If he kept in the common way, joining him there would be easy. This great Saint seemed not to belong to a different world; one need not stand on tip-toe to chat with him. He knew life as we know it; he is friendly and indulgent. We have many things in common; one can be at ease with him.

The text of Madame de Chantal's description, however, warrants closer inspection. "There was nothing odd or striking about him"; she writes, "he possessed none of the obvious virtues which establish a person's sanctity before the eyes of all; he performed no spectacular deeds to draw the admiration of the crowd. He kept in the common way, but he did so in a manner so divine and heavenly that it seems to me that nothing else in his life was so admirable." She goes on to say: "Everything was so orderly, so calm, and the light of God was so clear in his soul that he saw the hand of God at work

in the most insignificant matters." And finally: "It seems to me, naïvely perhaps, that my blessed Father was a mirror in human form wherein the Son of God was faithfully portrayed; for truly the harmonious disposition of this holy soul was of an altogether superior and divine order."

This much I gleaned from reading and rereading the complete edition of his works published by the Order of the Visitation at Annecy. He kept in the common way, and usually we behold him on the first rung of Jacob's ladder which joins earth to heaven. He is just a little higher than we. It is easy to follow his lead, so sweetly does he invite us to ascend. But, if one looks back, one is overtaken by a sudden religious vertigo, as it were. It was this sensation that brought home to me how little qualified I was to speak of him.

At least I should like to help make him better known.

One of his recent biographers, my learned colleague, the Abbé Henri Brémond, is of the opinion that St Francis de Sales has not yet shown to what extent his power and influence may extend. Because his writings are at once too florid and too crystal clear, they have been badly misinterpreted. Has he not been called the Bernadine de St Pierre of devotion ? Sainte-Beuve characterizes him as a sweet, harmonious, swan-like soul, a pious Lamartine. Huysmans refers to his writing as "insipid" — Huysmans, who doubtless would have saints go through the thrills and contortions of mystic acrobats. There are those who confuse extravagance in writing with forcefulness, and others who see great depths in

mere obscurity. Authors given to blatant ranting, or to haziness, often attain great popularity while simple, limpid writers are disregarded. The latter are read rapidly and incorrectly; because their style is not startling they are termed superficial.

In a recent article in *Le Temps,* M. Paul Souday, a profound and erudite critic whose learning embraces many fields, reiterated and gave his personal endorsement to the opinions of Sainte-Beuve and Huysmans that the style of St Francis de Sales is too flowery. He substantiated his charge in the following arraignment, which I reprint here, confident that the scholarly critic will revise his judgment. If he will be gracious enough to reread St Francis de Sales, he will, I am sure, feel the prick of the thorns hidden beneath the roses.

"His most famous work, the 'Introduction to a Devout Life,'" writes M. Souday, "begins with a comparison of the Holy Ghost to the flower-girl, Glycera. The rest of the book abundantly fulfills the promises of such a beginning. The author hands out mere spiritual bouquets and soft and perfumed metaphors; he smiles and cajoles; he serves his readers with the honey and sugar and jam of literature. He does not address himself to a religious audience already well advanced toward spiritual perfection, but to men and women of the world whom he desires to lead in that direction without frightening them. Consequently he makes concessions to them. He is not the type of priest who would forbid peasants to dance; he does not warn Philothea to avoid balls, but merely cautions her that she should dance 'modestly, with dig-

nity, and in a suitable frame of mind.' There is a soothing, flattering unctiousness, tinged with a romantic flavor, about his words which brings to mind 'Astrea' by his friend, Honoré d'Urfé. He makes up for his lack of austerity with pious effusions. His mysticism, too, remains accessible and temperate, lacking the glowing outbursts of a writer like Saint Theresa. Yet he manages withal to write with a truly edifying ease and grace. Certainly the lords and ladies at the courts of Henri IV and Louis XIII could not but benefit morally by following the precepts of this good saint. His fervor, however, is 'a little too soft and sweet,' and his florid style in the end palls on one. His second intimate friend, Msgr Camus, Bishop of Belley, told him, 'Everything you touch becomes rose-tinted.' There is too much that is saccharine in his writing; he includes too many insipidly sweet little candy-box pictures. Sainte-Beuve studied the works of St Francis de Sales with great sympathy — how else could one treat so gentle a man ? — yet in the end he characterizes it as 'seraphic twaddle.'

"St Francis de Sales, founder of the Visitandines, was directly responsible for such cults as the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Conception, the Children of Mary, and for the thousands of inane, ultra-pietistic pamphlets and similar rubbish which one finds in the shops along the rue Saint Sulpice in Paris, at which Huysmans used to get so exasperated. These last, of course, are not wholly to be blamed on him, and they cannot detract from the charm of his writings. But how much more masculine in tone is the work of a Pascal or a Bossuet !"

How limited is M. Souday's understanding of St Francis de Sales ! On the contrary, the discipline he preaches is most difficult of achievement, the dogmas he urges much stricter than those of Bossuet; his style is not labored but is naturally limpid and shows every evidence of painstaking care and attention. Must restrained and polished writing ever go unappreciated ?

But saintliness, more than genius even, is beyond us. In describing a quality so largely outside our ordinary experience, one runs the risk of not merely seeming inordinately presumptuous, but of appearing to invest oneself with the qualities one is describing. There is, however, a passage in the correspondence of St Francis de Sales that reassures me. In a letter to Madame Le Blanc, who was disturbed because her devotion seemed to take the form of words rather than of acts accomplished, he wrote: "We are not hypocrites if we fail to carry out in practice what we have hoped and promised to do. Dear God ! If that were the case, what would become of us ? I would have to remain silent for fear of becoming a hypocrite, for if I spoke of perfection it would follow that I considered myself perfect. Now you know, my dear daughter, that I do not think myself perfect merely because I describe perfection any more than I consider myself an Italian because I happen to be conversing in that language; but I do think I know the language of perfection, having learned it by talking to those who spoke it fluently !" How neatly he states the case and meets the irresponsible accusations of hypocrisy frequently cast at those whose hearts may be weaker than

their intellects but who at least do not casuistically ennoble their faults and glorify their errors.

So I shall venture to speak Italian although my knowledge of it is limited.

I am even further reassured by the fact that St Francis de Sales bestowed his friendship upon two of my fellow novelists. One of them, it is true, was an ecclesiastic, Peter Camus, Bishop of Belley. Though he loved him devotedly, the Bishop of Geneva could not dissuade him from writing down to "the taste of this poor world." The other was a still more worldly novelist, a writer of best-sellers in fact, Honoré d'Urfé, the author of "Astrea," a novel in which the loves of Celadon are subtly analyzed, which foreshadowed the psychological literature of the seventeenth century. Yet though St Francis tolerated d'Urfé, he characterized as "pestilential" the reading of romances like "Amadis" and similar tales of bizarre and extravagant events. Hence I trust that with his usual patience he will tolerate the posthumous friendship of a third novelist, his Savoyard neighbor and colleague, many generations removed, in that Florimontane Academy that he founded at Annecy thirty or forty years before the birth of the French Academy.

H. B.

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

Theologian of Love

Saint Francis de Sales

BOOK I

THE PERSONALITY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

CHAPTER I

SAVOYARD PILGRIMAGES

ALL Northern Savoy, from the shores of Lake Leman to those of Lake Annecy, from the plains of Chablais to the snow wall enclosing the Chamonix valley, cities and even mountains — all are redolent of St Francis de Sales. No father, priest, king, or saint ever was in closer touch with all types and classes of people. Always on the move, either by carriage, on horseback or on foot, he permitted all to accost him, rebuffed no one, and after sizing them up deftly and surely, swiftly won their hearts. His influence is still felt. There is something hallowed about the places where he is known to have been — the old chestnut tree, for example, in which he sought refuge from the wolves is now venerated as a shrine. He is a part of that legendary wealth so vivid to us in our early years and which re-

mains with us throughout the rest of our lives. It is easy to imagine him commanding the animals, talking to the stars and the elements. His eloquence, however, is not like that of St Francis of Assisi. It is not all ardor, enthusiasm, exaltation. It is more precise, more penetrating, more given to the little things of life, the humblest and most ordinary realities. And though one is not conscious of it, one feels that earth has been abandoned for the open heavens.

One autumn not long ago I visited the valley of the Thorens where he was born on August 21, 1567. "Since Thorens lies along the road from Menthon and La Val des Clets to la Roche and Geneva," writes the local historian, "it seems likely that the temple in the district called Thorens was dedicated to Jupiter and Mars." For the old chronicler insists absolutely on tracing the origins of St Francis de Sales back to Roman antiquity, and on connecting the name "de Sales" with a college of Salian priests founded by the Romans when they conquered the Allobrogians. "Salian priests were created by the Numa to be the guardians and ministers of certain brass bucklers which had fallen from heaven. The name *Salian* was applied to them in disparagement because of the turmoil they aroused with their leaping and dancing, when in March they performed the rites of their order and, clad in flowing vestments, with wide brass girdles about their waists and shining brass helmets on their heads, they beat on their shields with little daggers. . ." Had he learned that his name was derived from this gymnastic performance, our Saint would have smiled

with his fine, courteous indulgence, believing as he did that titles and nobility merely placed one under a still greater obligation to serve well.

The old chateau at Thorens is no more. In 1630, it was burned by soldiers of Louis XIII. If we may accept the picture still to be seen at the foot of a genealogical chart preserved in the Saint's family, this castle was one large forest of towers. Charles Augustus de Sales, nephew of the Saint and one of his first biographers, compares it to a city. It is more fully described in a volume, on the title page of which we read: *An historical and chronological account of the Family of St Francis de Sales, bishop and prince of Geneva* (*divided into three parts in which are recounted the origins and chronological succession of members of the de Sales family along with sketches of the lives of the most distinguished of his ancestors and descendants from the year* 1000 *to the year* 1660 *by Nicholas de Hauteville, priest, doctor of theology and canon of the Cathedral of St Peter at Geneva. Printed by permission of the King and with the approval of the Doctors M. VI. LX. IX.*)

"This fortress," we read, "dates from time immemorial, and is composed of three main groups of buildings, flanked by six high towers and three lower turrets. The two main buildings rise respectively three and four stories high: there is also a courtyard, and a terrace with a poultry-yard underneath, so it is not difficult to imagine how magnificent are the foundations. The chapel is dignified and beautiful, its rich decorations bearing witness to the piety of those who built it and the devotion

of those who have preserved it. It was in this venerable spot that St Francis de Sales had an ecstatic vision during the course of which the secrets of the Institute he was to establish came to him, and he saw the faces of the three illustrious ladies whom God destined to be the foundation stones of the Order of the Visitation. . ."

The present castle, formerly the chateau de Compey, was bought by the Saint and has been restored at various times. It commands the valley. The approach to it is over a bridge and a double postern. A terrace, wide and beautiful, overlooks the valley which ends in a *cul-de-sac*. There is no pass between Parmelon on the right and Le Terret on the left. The rich fiery autumn foliage which linked the mountain des Frettes to Mount du Loup in a regular design, partially hid the rocks. La Filier rises and flows along in this solitude among meadows and woods — a solitude which is neither wild nor gloomy but, on the contrary, peaceful and restful.

The main building is surrounded by round towers covered with brilliant, flaming wild-grape vines which contrast strikingly to the light gold of the leaves of an American walnut which rises behind. On the side opposite the terrace there is a much more extensive vista. To one side lies the village of Thorens, its great steeple piercing the horizon; to the other, a wide, rolling plain spreads out toward Geneva, broken only by small hills. A broad, airy, comfortable country, characteristic of Upper Savoy; the mountains rugged yet not spectacular or obtrusive, the valleys open and broad, giving one a sense of sweep and distance, for the magnificent austerity of

Chamonix is much rarer in our section of France than is generally believed.

Ruggedness and smoothness — there are few corners in Savoy where this combination is not to be found. Either one or other of those two notes is always dominant; yet each balances the other, they harmonize, and together compose the *leit-motif* of this land of strength and delicacy where warriors had to be diplomats and where, even today, a man is likely to have to earn his pleasure before enjoying it.

In Savoy the most ignorant peasant may easily come out with an observation showing the most astonishing delicacy and perception, yet there, too, in the most polite and cultivated of gentlemen, beneath a veneer of courtesy, you are likely to find a certain brusqueness, or even uncouthness. But one would be mistaken to judge them too hastily. They are an unyielding and reserved race. Like the mountains about them, they are on the defensive and do not confide in the first comer. The epitome of this sturdy race is to be found in a Joseph de Maistre or a St Francis de Sales. In the former strength and ruggedness seem to predominate, in the latter gentleness and delicacy. Yet the correspondence of Joseph de Maistre reveals him as one of the most spiritual and tender of fathers; whereas there is no spiritual director more firm, more vigorous or more exacting than St Francis de Sales, though on the exterior he is all courtesy and grace.

The present chateau at Compey now occupied by direct descendants of St Francis has been in the possession of the de Sales family since the destruction of its predeces-

sor, which stood upon a knoll a little above it. They have furnished it with antique pictures, furniture, and various other relics of the past. There is, for instance, a showcase containing relics of the Bishop of Geneva — the silver crosier, mitres, and other ornaments in which he was buried and which were removed when his coffin was opened for his beatification. In a drawing-room on the first floor is a full-length portrait, attributed to Van Dyke, of Louis de Sales, governor of Annecy and brother of the Saint. He is a magnificent old trooper, tall, erect, with an alert, military carriage, every inch a warrior and man of action, a typical member of the nobility of Savoy.

On the second floor there is a portrait of the Saint which is probably the best likeness of him in existence except, of course, for the portrait in the hospital in Annecy which was almost certainly painted from life. It pictures a ruddy-complexioned man with reddish-brown hair and features so regular that they look as though they had been hewn out of hard wood, the general air being one of rustic majesty. The Turin portrait, generally more highly thought of, is more soft and insipid. In the gallery one may admire the same beautiful Tobias tapestries which the Saint must often have gazed at when, as a child, he passed by them.

And lastly, in the hallway there is that curious genealogical chart with the pictures of the two chateaux, to which I referred a moment ago.

Leaving the new chateau, one follows a stony little path up the gentle slope of the hill to the site of the castle where St Francis was born. It stood at the very end of

the valley, overshadowed by the green, wooded slopes of le Terret; on the other side, the view of Mount Parmelon and the valley is more extensive. There is now a simple and rather charming little chapel with a small tower on the spot formerly occupied by the room where our Saint was born. A row of linden trees links this chapel to the granite cross which marks the place where St Francis had the vision mentioned in the "Historical and Chronological Account of the Family of St Francis de Sales."

In this old chronicle, and again in a book by the Marquis Leon Costa de Beauregard on the castle at Compey, I have come across an interesting anecdote about the old chateau de Sales. The Compey were an illustrious family. After numerous marriages with members of the de Sales family, their nearest neighbors in Thorens, differences arose between the two houses. For three centuries the strife continued until finally Philibert de Compey, completely ruined and pursued by the Duke of Savoy, sought refuge in the home of his enemy, Christopher de Sales, and died there. The "Historical and Chronological Account" tells the story as follows:

"Philibert de Compey was reduced to such extremities that to avoid arrest by the police he was forced to seek asylum in the castle of the de Sales. Behold in this event an admirable stroke of Divine Providence, that rules all earthly affairs ! Death, that irresistible force which more often seems relentlessly to divide and separate, succeeds in uniting two wholly incompatible persons, two houses apparently hopelessly at odds, two sets of interests that no one supposed could be reconciled. Philibert de Com-

pey begs the honor of dying in a castle which he had done all in his power to destroy. Christopher receives him with every consideration imaginable, and gives orders that he be served in a manner befitting his rank.

"On the twenty-ninth of July, in the year 1538, being seized with a violent illness, the poor fugitive expressed a desire to have the consolation of visiting Thorens once more, incognito. Christopher de Sales, therefore, had him brought there and ordered the doors of the castle closed so as to insure perfect safety of life and honor for Philibert while he made his will. This document states, in appropriate terms, that in the presence of the noble and powerful lord, Christopher de Sales, Philibert de Compey declares his last wishes and intentions.

"After the reading and signing of this testament, he conjured Christopher not to abandon him, but to permit him again to be carried to the chateau de Sales. The kind old gentleman did everything that a true friend could, remaining continually at his bedside to comfort him and to keep him from becoming bitter at the sad fate that had overtaken him. On the thirtieth day of July, Philibert de Compey made a general confession of his sins to the Curé of Thorens, and begged to be allowed to receive Holy Viaticum in public. As the priest lifted the Sacred Host above the heads of the large assemblage of people who had gathered to witness this spectacle of Christian piety, the sick man in a clear, firm voice confessed belief in the Roman Catholic and Apostolic faith, asked forgiveness of his enemies, and, addressing Christopher de Sales, uttered the following memorable words:

" 'In truth, Sir, I admit my fiery temper has unjustly caused you much trouble, and that I am under great obligations to you. You have rendered me good for evil in assisting me in my extreme necessity. If I merit that God should hear my plea, I pray that He may be your reward. I foresee that, despite my opposition, my lands will some day be joined to yours. I rejoice at the thought of this and I beg Almighty God that this union may help atone for the wrongs that my predecessors and I have done to you and yours. I beseech you to forgive me and to remember my soul when I shall have rendered it up to its Maker.'

"Then Philibert received the body of our Lord Jesus Christ while all those present burst into tears. A few minutes after this exemplary and edifying preparation, he died. Christopher took pains to conduct his funeral with all due pomp, and to have all the beautiful ceremonies of the Church performed for the repose of the soul of this nobleman whose death was such a loss to an ancient and noble family."

Is not this scene typical of the way in which in the sixteenth century the boldest and most ungovernable spirits made death an occasion for making peace with God and man? This Christopher de Sales was the grandfather of our Saint. Hence it is evident that Francis came of a fine race, generous and merciful. In him the piety and brusque vigor that characterized it were blended to perfection.

As I returned down the path from the little memorial chapel the shadow of the mountains was slowly creeping

up the valley toward me. My guide, Baron de Roussy de Sales, himself a member of this distinguished family, pointed to a herd of cows grazing in a nearby pasture:

"They are kept by a deaf-mute," he explained. "In a moment they will be coming home."

Indeed, as the sun set, the door of a farmhouse opened and a woman appeared and gave a loud call. Immediately, every cow hastened toward the barn, their bells tinkling harmoniously. They were followed by the infirm little shepherd.

With the twilight, an infinite peace settled over all the valley. I feasted my eyes on that landscape which had been the scene of the childhood of St Francis de Sales.

Little is left of the castle at La Tuile on the shore of Lake Annecy or of that at Brens in Chablais, both of which belonged to the Saint's family and re-echoed the shouts of the little Francis as he played. Traces of him abound everywhere in Annecy. To the Lambert house on the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, directly opposite the Cathedral, is affixed a marble plaque which records that he lived in it from 1602 to 1610. And on the Rue St Claire, in the Favre mansion, a beautiful sixteenth century edifice built by Galois de Regard, Seigneur of Morgenex and Bishop of Bagnores, the first sessions of the Florimontane Academy were held. President Favre had acquired this property in 1606, but when his judicial functions called him to Chambéry, he turned it over to St Francis de Sales, who lived there from 1610 until his death. In the courtyard one may still see the pavilion,

or rather, the square tower to which he retired to write the "Treatise on the Love of God." But the host of those who sought his counsel followed him mercilessly even there. Due to the extensive restoration and rebuilding which followed the breaking up of the estate, this house no longer preserves its original character.

Thus the Bishop had no dwelling of his own; his first episcopal palace was only a loan from a generous friend. "It is pleasant," he writes, "to think that I have no home of my own, that the owner of the house in which I live can put me out when he wishes. It gives me a point in common with my Master, Jesus Christ, Who had not whereon to lay His head. I want to die with the glory of having nothing of my own; that is my only ambition." To have nothing of one's own, and to leave so great a heritage to others is indeed a most sublime glory.

Once when the Senate of Savoy, at the behest of an important noble, issued a warrant for the seizure of his personal property, the Bishop was unperturbed. "Ah !" he replied with that quiet serenity which is sometimes mistaken for weakness but which in him is evidence of force of character, "had they taken my temporal possessions, they would have left me the richer spiritually. Besides, do you think that my parishioners would have left me to die of hunger ? On the contrary, I would have had more difficulty in refusing than in accepting their donations. The wealth of the Church is like a beard; the more one shaves, the thicker it becomes. Those who have nothing possess all."

In Annecy, too, one may still see the ruins of the Char-

moisy mansion, and the house which was the cradle of the Visitation and which today belongs to the Sisters of St Joseph. St Francis de Sales often went there, and the meagre little chapel where the first Visitandines received the veil from him in person and consecrated themselves to God, there is a picture which faithfully reproduces that interesting scene. And lastly, in the crypt in the monastery recently built by the Visitation nuns on a hill overlooking the city, are his mortal remains placed side by side with those of Ste Chantal.

When, in August 1911, the bodies of St Francis de Sales and Ste Chantal were transferred to the new convent on the Cret du Maure, dominating Annecy, a procession of more than one hundred thousand pilgrims accompanied the relics. There were two cardinals, fifty bishops and mitred abbots and five or six hundred priests. But more impressive than their numbers was the attitude of the pilgrims as for more than three hours they followed the procession under the relentless rays of the sun. Many of them had come from afar and had been on a train all night; not one of them had slept the night before, nor would they sleep the following night; most of them carried provisions with them in order to be sure of eating, no matter where, after the ceremony. Two nights without sleep; a whole day spent on their feet; heat, thirst, the press of crowds, and the tantalizing difficulty of trying to see something—what a test of endurance! Yet in this vast mob composed of people of every class and age, villagers and city folk, children and old men, there was not the least disorder; not a shout, nor a com-

plaint, no jostling nor unseemly crowding. As if the authorities had known that this would be so, no special precautions had been taken to preserve order and no extra police had been assembled. What an amazing exhibition of restraint !

Philosophers and novelists have attempted to analyze group psychology. Gustave Le Bon has written a treatise on the "Psychology of Crowds." Victor Hugo in "Les Miserables," Tolstoi in "War and Peace," Zola in "The Downfall" and in "Germinal," Huysmans in the "Crowds at Lourdes," Paul Adam, Rosny, and, more recently, M. Roland Dorgelès in "Saint-Magloire"—all have essayed to depict the thousand-headed being that we refer to as a "nation" or an "army," to understand the collective forces at work in a mine, a factory or a popular demonstration. But these writings have always chosen to describe tragic moments when emotion is running high.

But how are we to explain a crowd such as I have just described, a calm, peaceable crowd that does not shout, that asks for nothing, that insists upon neither bread nor a miracle ? What power gives it cohesion and directs it ? The answer is that this crowd is another instance of that marvellous plasticity which causes a group to submit to the direction of an individual. In this case an invisible man was in control and had no difficulty in imposing docility, restraint, and obedience upon this heterogeneous collection of people. St Francis de Sales, dead for three hundred years, led that Savoyard crowd, and an extraordinary spectacle it was !

Thus the procession which, for three hours, wound its

way through Annecy rendered homage to the beneficent influence of the Bishop by its calmness, its dignity, its orderliness. It sang and it prayed, but, prudently, it carried its provisions with it. All those bulging little bags reminded me again how careful St Francis de Sales was to link religion to the details of everyday life. Did he not teach that the most efficacious spiritual discipline is to be derived from the practice of such unspectacular virtues as caring for the poor, visiting the sick, fulfilling one's duty to one's family with all that entails, and being constantly on one's guard against the dangers of idleness ?

It is to be regretted that no detailed account of the procession in 1911 has been preserved to serve as a companion volume to an earlier work entitled: "An account of the Ceremonies observed in the City of Annecy on the occasion of the canonization of St Francis de Sales, bishop and prince of Geneva, founder of the Institute of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Published by Robert Phillipes, printer and bookseller, near the College of the Reverend Jesuit Fathers, Grenoble, 1666, with the consent of the King."

Some of the descriptions in this volume are indeed delightful: ". . . Thence they proceeded to the church of the Visitation, where they found that the steeple and the upper part of the façade of the church, the monastery windows, and the nearby gate to the city walls, all were decorated with candles and lanterns grouped about pictures of their royal highnesses and of the Saint and the coats of arms of Savoy and of the Order of the Visitation;

many inscriptions of an appropriate nature were also in evidence. There were also torches, flaming swords, stars, crescents, and the like, each symbolic of a different phase in the life of the Saint. Above the dome of the church a sunrise was depicted, beneath which might be read this quotation from Cassiodorus: *'Origo ipsa jam gloria est,'* which referred to the birth of the little prince. During the course of the ceremonies this sun burst into flame and fell to the earth in a shower of sparks, thus symbolizing the ball of fire which once fell on the Saint. The heavens were ablaze with sky rockets and fireworks of all descriptions."

When one comes upon a passage such as this one reaps the reward for browsing about old book stores where, year after year, musty tomes, pregnant with the past, sleep undisturbed.

St Francis de Sales received the homage of country people long before the literary world and people in the cities had had their attention called to him. It was they who first invoked him as a Saint, and paved the way for the miracles necessary for his canonization by praying for them. And though he converted the district about Thonon, and was Bishop of Annecy, neither they, nor Savoy, nor France itself seemed bent upon honoring the memory of this glorious predecessor of Bossuet — his predecessor twice over, by virtue of the vigorous clarity of his prose and the determined yet ever courteous struggle which he waged against Protestantism — so consequently the little parish of Lullin, near Chablais, decided some

years ago to erect a statue of him, and to place it high up on a site he would have liked. No, they did not enlist the services of a great artist ! Their resources were limited, and they were satisfied with an ordinary bronze statue, banal to an extreme. In France, the peasants have little money. They prefer to contribute their sweat and their labor rather than to deplete their pocket-books. The curé of this parish was ingenious; he found an outlet for their desire to contribute their services.

Among the assets of the community was a mountain with twin peaks which they called "The Fork" — and indeed from below the two peaks did resemble the two tines of a fork. The view from this spot is extensive — on one side one may see the rich plain of Chablais and Lake Leman, blue as the Mediterranean, and on the other, beyond valleys and mountain chains, the snows of Mount Blanc.

"We shall put it up there."

"But, Father, there is no road."

"We shall make one."

Through forests and over bare rocks a road was built and in September 1898, the statue of the Saint, tightly bound with ropes, was pushed and hauled by the robust country lads to the very top of the mountain, where it arrived intact though slightly battered.

This statue represents St Francis de Sales standing, an open book in one hand and a pen in the other. Were I a sculptor, my conception of him would be quite different. In the first place, I would have him on horseback. No one who knew anything of the almost pathetic sim-

plicity of the routine of his daily life would picture him as a writer in a quiet study, devoting himself without interruption to the composition of treatises on abstract subjects, and addressing formal letters to the beautiful noblewomen whose spiritual advisor he was.

Never has anyone led a more active life than St Francis de Sales. A bishop at the age of thirty-five, he travelled incessantly over his inaccessible diocese in a carriage, or on horseback over mule paths, and often on foot in places where a horse could not go. As our Saviour sought the lamb strayed in the thickets, so he pursued souls. He used his pen to extend his influence and in the exercise of his authority much as a Captain uses his sword.

Like almost all the great books of the seventeenth century, his books were written not with art as a goal but for practical purposes, spasmodically and in fragmentary bits. They derive their unity and continuity from the clarity and vigor of his thought. On his death-bed, he complained: "Never have I been able to devote one entire day to my dear books." Indeed he would have distributed that entire day in small portions, for he was always generous with his most precious possession, his time. Thus he died at the age of fifty-five, having always had more to do than there was time in which to do it.

And I should represent him with his hand raised in the act of giving his blessing, for this active priest had a gift for spreading peace wherever he went. By will power and ceaseless vigilance he, naturally of a quick, tempestuous nature, made himself an orderly, dependable, calm person. Educated in the best of all institutions,

the school of practical experience, he was a positivist before that philosophy had been formulated, and preached the doctrine of acceptance, the theory that one should adapt oneself to conditions and circumstances that one cannot modify. And going still further he showed how almost unlimited are the results that may be achieved once we have so adapted ourselves to objective reality.

Not long ago I returned to see this monument to St Francis. The striking feature of it, of course, is not the statue but the road that leads to it. The site was certainly well chosen.

The Saint dominates this whole country-side, which he reconverted to Catholicism; he towers above the ruins of the castle of Allinges, his first stopping place on his journey for souls. Below him in the valley the castle of Marclaz, fast crumbling into dust, recalls his visit to Madame de Charmoisy, for whom he wrote a part of the "Introduction to a Devout Life." Farther on are the famous chestnut tree at la Chavanne and the village of Noyer, where, when every door was shut against him, he was forced to take refuge for the night in the village oven. He understood and loved in all its diversity this vast panorama extending as it does to the far-off heights of Mount Blanc.

In this connection we find another theory, generally accepted, yet deserving further investigation. J. J. Rousseau is usually given credit for imbuing us with that consciousness of nature which makes us pursue it into all its mysterious retreats and solitudes, whereas previous generations, we are told, tolerated it only in its refined and

gentler aspects. Doubtless it was not until the romantic revival that our writers consented to subordinate man to nature; and for this all praise to them. But long before then they had appreciated nature and communed with it. Madame de Sévigné, for example, would walk alone along the wooded paths on her estate at Les Rochers, sometimes until midnight, thus giving full play to that inner sensitiveness and perception which was the key-note to her whole life. How many verses like this we might quote from Ronsard:

I delight in gardens that breathe of wildness . . .

But before Rousseau, Byron, Vigny, Lamartine, and their lyrics about nature came St Francis de Sales, like a guide in the snow, expressing in a language, pure as a mountain spring yet colorful as a country dialect, the exaltation that man receives, not from conquered summits—he went beyond mere human pride—but from that unbroken vastness where one scarcely knows whether one is still on earth or has left behind the regions which are man's domain.

Writing from Chamonix to Madame de Chantal he told her: "I have met God in all his sweetness and fragrance, even on the highest and bleakest of our mountains, where the unaffected peasants adore Him naïvely and fervently, and where the deer and chamois, scampering about over those terrifying masses of ice, proclaim His praise. Lacking in devotion, I only understood a few words of their language but it seemed to me that what they said was very beautiful." It was he who, first of all our writers,

heard the voice of the mountains. To him it sounded like a religious chant, and not like a belligerent hymn of conquest. He made the solitude a sanctuary to the living God.

He was thus one of the first French prose poets, the remote predecessor of such colorful masters of pastoral prose as the immortal Mistral, or Edmund Le Roy, who in a volume like "Jacquou le Croquant gives us the quintessence of Périgorde," or Joseph de Pesquidoux who paints such haunting pictures of rustic games in Gascony, or de Pomairols, or Charles de Bordeu, or Louis Mercier. That quality seeped into his writing because as a child he lived in close contact with nature, as did that other great sixteenth century master of prose, Jean Bertaut, now remembered largely for his poems, almost as charming and lovely as those of Ronsard: witness this line:

That hour of twilight when the fields are still.

In others of his poems there is an undercurrent of optimistic melancholy well summed up in the line:

Much have I known of sorrow, but of love yet more.

Such verses as these seem to foreshadow the lyric harmonies of Lamartine and the stoic lamentations of de Vigny. And in passing I cannot resist quoting this passage from Jean Bertaut. Though it was written at the same time as the "Introduction," he was perhaps inspired by the more vigorous, more polished, more mystical yet not more picturesque figures of speech used by St Francis de Sales:

"The wise farmer is careful to hoe the ground around a grape-vine which he knows to be good; he puts manure about it, covers it well when the weather is cold and guards it from the mid-day sun. Likewise with his fields; either he allows them to lie fallow occasionally or, if it irks him not to have them bear a crop each year, he plants them with different seeds each year so that in this way they will be able to obtain a certain relaxation. . . . Look about you; notice that often a whole field bears no grain; here the grape-vines accentuate the gentle slopes of hills, there they set off the shimmering green of the olive trees, and beyond they make the red of the rose seem still more red. Sometimes the laborer abandons his plough for a moment to cover with earth the root of a flower; and it is with the same calloused hands with which he guides the stubborn oxen in the vineyards, that he gently presses the udders of his cows and goats at milking time. You, too, should not always sow the same seeds in the field of your soul, like the farmer who fails to rotate his crops. Let the rose of chastity bloom in your gardens; link with it the lily of beautiful thoughts; and let your peonies be watered by the living fountain of the blood of your Saviour." The flower-girl, Glycera, seems not far in the offing in that passage. But she braided the garland of our Saint even better. One should turn for example to the nocturn in the "Introduction" in which he describes the waters of the little brook lit up by reflections of the sky and the stars. All the peace of the Savoy country-side is to be found in St Francis de Sales.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD

SAINTLINESS, like genius, has a universal quality. But its origins are rooted in a soil and in a race. The larger a tree grows, the deeper do its roots push into the ground. I shall not, however, make the mistake of depicting St Francis de Sales as a local, regional saint. But I am not a hagiographer; this will not be an exhaustive study either of his life or of his writings. My intentions are less pretentious. The quality in St Francis de Sales that I wish both to describe and extol is his *cœur de chair.*

It is a curious coincidence that almost the same words might be used in beginning the biographies of St Francis de Sales, and Joseph de Maistre, and one might add to theirs the name of their less celebrated and more nearly contemporary compatriot, the Marquis Costa de Beauregard. All three were members of a large family, presided over by a strict, domineering father who held an important public office and in his private life lived up to high ideals, subordinating his own welfare to that of his country. Each had a charitable, tender-hearted mother whose naturally maternal instinct was somewhat tempered by the fact that upon her fell the burden of administering the affairs of a large household. Each was

brought up in a country chateau where he witnessed the constant coming and going of farmers, tenants, vassals, clients and solicitors, and developed a habit of thinking and feeling in terms of the soil. Thus they acquired a peasant's ruggedness combined with a careful education, a refined taste and a splendid physique. As children they knew the stern realities of life, and came to experience that wholesome contentment which grows naturally from leading a simple life on a large estate where one is both protected and allowed a large allowance of freedom. The fine constitutions and wholesome outlooks which they gained at this time deeply influenced their subsequent lives. Such are the outstanding features of the early lives of these three authors, typical of the best to be found in Savoy.

Francis de Sales, Seigneur of Nouvelles, the father of the Saint, filled several important political offices with distinction. He was a well set up man, with a pleasant face and an air of distinction; he was courageous, adroit, chivalrous and accomplished what he set out to do. Msgr Picard, one of the most recent biographers of the de Sales family relates that in 1559, at the festivities given in honor of the marriage of his brother Louis, Francis de Sales, the father, was attracted by a distinguished and virtuous young lady by the name of Frances de Sionnaz, who at the time was only seven or eight years of age. He married her seven years later when he was forty-two years old, and she only fifteen. This biographer assures us that never was there a better match. Except for the discrepancy in age, I too consider it a most ideal marriage; Fran-

ces de Sionnaz, serious and loyal as she was, made an exemplary wife.

According to Madame de Chantal, she was "a generous soul, noble, pure, innocent, unassuming; she was a real mother and nurse to the poor; modest, humble, and cheerful to all and very peaceable at home." Immediately upon her marriage, when she was scarcely more than a child herself, she begged God to bless her with children, and she consecrated her first to Him. She reminds one of those primitive virgins who are so childlike and ingenuous that they seem to be playing dolls with the Child Jesus. One imagines her as somewhat like the figure in Gerard David's *Vierge à la soupe au lait*. She must have knelt piously at all the shrines of Our Lady of Deliverance to which she had occasion to go frequently.

Frances de Sionnaz's mother, Madame de Chevron-Villette, who seems to have loved marriage more than a husband, as she was married four times, gave her daughter the castle of Boisy as a dowry, on condition that her son-in-law assume that title. Despite the wide discrepancy in their ages, Francis and Frances de Boisy had similar tastes and agreed in subordinating their personal desires to their conceptions of duty. He despised Protestantism, which he regarded as false because, as he put it, it was the work of a handful of uncultured men, and was actually twelve years younger than he. His wife shared this aversion, and would never allow a Protestant nurse to be employed for her children. The first sorrow of her life was that she was unable to nurse her first-born, the future Saint.

Once in my presence a village priest, who, though he was beloved by the poor of his parish, was not too accurate in his theology, made a rather startling pronouncement about our Saint. "Saint Francis de Sales," he informed us, "was so eager to love God that he was prematurely born." That the Saint was born before his time is true, but I should not have attributed the fact to such lofty motives. Madame de Boisy gave birth to twelve other children, the last of whom, little Jeanne, was born three days before the ordination of her eldest son; her baptism was our Saint's first sacerdotal act. She died while still an infant at the home of Madame de Chantal, her death inspiring that sublime letter of St Francis de Sales, in which he reprimands Madame de Chantal for having offered her own life to God in exchange for that of the dying girl's, and in which he begs her to submit humbly to the dictates of Providence.

Father de la Rivière has preserved for us the story of his committing his first sin. He was five or six years old at the time, and his offence was taking a gaudily colored scarf from the carpenter at the castle, who informed M. de Boisy: "The child was sent for, and when questioned he admitted at once and without making any attempt to conceal the fact, that he had taken it. He was punished immediately, although, as he was given to understand, the punishment was less severe than they had planned because he had told the truth. And after that, he never took the least thing without permission, not even fruit. . ."

Unlike most modern children, he was not brought up

all bound up in cotton batting, with a corps of nurses and doctors always at hand. He was allowed "no choice as to what he should eat or where he should sleep, no special finery; and even more important, they explained to him as clearly as possible the reason for everything they made him do. They replied patiently to all his little questions so that he might learn not only to be virtuous but also to understand the reasons why they desired him to be so."

Father de la Rivière, however, writes a somewhat romantic apology and pictures an insipidly sweet saint; he has done his share in spreading a false opinion of the Bishop of Geneva. The unique quality in St Francis de Sales is the perfect balance which he maintained between mind and heart, between forcibleness and gentleness, decisive action and unruffled repose. Such a blending of contradictory qualities is obtained only by persistent effort towards a much-desired goal. He had to control both a temper so violent that it would get entirely out of control, and an imagination that once drove him to the brink of despair. He was by no means the perfect child Father de la Rivière would have us believe. Nothing is duller than these fulsome biographies which seek only to to be edifying and which end by being merely unconvincing. God's part in sacred missions is great; but in the preparation for them there is a human side and we like to see it. If the bridges between the saints and the ordinary faithful are cut, how can we possibly follow them?

When he first went to school he was sent to La Roche,

where he was under an instructor named Peter Batailleur, and after that to a school at Annecy. It was at the latter institution that once on a holiday when he was walking with several companions on the bank of the Fier, the day seemed so beautiful and the flowing, rippling water so charming that, enraptured, he could not resist falling on his knees and pouring forth the fullness of his soul in prayer.

"My friends," he exclaimed, "let us pray together; let us invoke God who is so great and so good, since today He gives us leisure and a reason to do so." A reason and leisure, already he speaks with the voice of St Francis de Sales. He admires, he is exalted, he wishes to express his gratitude, but there is a time for everything and perhaps more pressing duties call. If some soul seeks his aid, he will immediately interrupt his contemplation or his thanksgiving. To those who come to him seeking advice, he always recommends that they fulfill the duties of their state in life; these they may always offer to God.

Already this child was exerting a happy influence upon those about him. His father remarked to his mother: "In truth, Madame, it seems to me that this child is less a son by nature than by divine grace; some instinct tells me that God intends making a wonderful character of him, for his modesty and his goodness make even me desire to become a better man, and I cannot explain whence comes that feeling." Later, his mother told Madame de Chantal, "When he was very small he was prepossessed with benedictions from heaven and breathed only the love of God."

Even as a tiny child he practised self-control. Was he afraid at night? Then he forced himself to overcome that fear and little by little he became so accustomed to it that he found pleasure in it. "I have schooled myself to darkness to such an extent," he writes later to reassure a person tortured with that same fear, "that the shadows and solitude of night are delightful to me because of the all-pervading presence of God which can be enjoyed to satiety in that solitude. The good angels surround you like a company of soldiers. You are under God's wings as the little chick under its mother's wings; why do you fear?"

Furthermore, as a child in the chateau at Thorens, he came into contact with servants and laborers. His knowledge was not derived merely from books; like all those who lived as children in the country, he was brought face to face with the practical side of life. He learned the importance of time and of patience; he knew that bread is earned by the sweat of one's brow, and that if one is to command others, firmness and impartiality are essential. The most interesting pages in Msgr Picard's account of St Francis de Sales' family are those which recount their relations with the peasants at Thorens and Brens, all contracts between them being entered into *on the cemetery wall, near the foot of the Cross.* What a perfect spot for making agreements, there in the shadow of the cross, with the dead near at hand to remind them that as one comes into this world without anything so will one depart, and that everything is ephemeral except the good one does! The business consisted in arranging about

leases, loans of cattle, receipts, reductions of fines, and the like.

At other times the scene was laid in the kitchen of the chateau, for the kitchen, in days gone by was not that mysterious and secluded place that it has become today, abandoned even by the mistress of the house, who, no longer wishing to venture there, sends the butler in her place; at various times she has doubtless noticed its clean, cold glittering walls, as inhospitable and dangerous in appearance as a chemical laboratory, and has turned back in awe. God grant that the comparison may end there and that no chemical mixtures may be concocted in our culinary domains ! But in those days the kitchen enjoyed its privileges to the full. It was large, high-ceilinged, airy. Since it was warmer in winter than any other room in the house — this was before the days of stoves and modern heating appliances — its cheering atmosphere attracted all. Workmen and farmers would gather there, and sit about eating and drinking. The children played there, although it was forbidden. Occasionally the master or mistress would come in for a moment to chat. Not infrequently guests, too, would wander in to look at the rows of spits and kettles, and inhale the aroma of the cooking food. They at least could be sure that they were not being poisoned, whereas we today . . . I leave it to anyone who lives in a really old house or chateau, isn't the kitchen as comfortable and as respectable as any room in the house; aren't you sometimes tempted to sit around in it chatting with farmhands or the postman ? Isn't it even pleasant to eat there occasionally ?

Would you know what the kitchen of the castle at Thorens was like? The "Historical and Chronological Account" describes it in minute detail. It was eighteen feet wide and twenty-four feet long. It was lighted by a large double window, and contained five doors, the entrance, one opening on the porch, another on the buttery, a fourth leading to the vegetable garden, and the last to the dairy.

"In the middle of the room is a long wide table, the top of which is made of two great planks of walnut; this is used both for serving the food and as a dining table for the more important servants. In the corner near the door leading to the porch is another table for the farmhands, ploughmen, etc. In the corner nearest the buttery are the sink and the shelves for the dishes. The floor is paved with round stones. Fastened to the rafters in the ceiling, which is Italian in style, are a number of hooks and nails from which hang smoked and salted meats." And our old book adds with a touch of melancholy: "I know these minute descriptions do not appeal to strangers, but they may interest servants, and a few old family friends who live some distance away and who, as they cannot visualize it just as it is, will not be bored by these details. At any rate, the reader can skip over these pages and pass on to other matters." Why, no indeed; what we enjoy most is to see things just as they were!

It was in this kitchen that our Saint committed a second sin. It is, therefore, a place of historic interest. He had just come in one day when the cook took some little cakes from the oven. They smelled so good that

Francis insisted on having one, so the cook maliciously thrust a burning hot one into his hand. He was about to drop it, but gluttony got the better of him, and bravely bearing his burn, he ate the cake and then went to have his mother dress his burn. To me, that brave little glutton is much more attractive than the angel described by Father de la Rivière.

It was in the kitchen that M. de Boisy usually transacted his business with tenant farmers, laborers, and others about his estate. They would pay what they owed in cash, in kind, or in promises; they would ask for assistance of some sort, for more time, or for some improvements on their houses or farms. Little Francis was often present upon such occasions, and the lessons to be drawn from them were not lost upon him. In her husband's absence, Madame de Boisy handled these matters herself, and proved herself to be kindly and generous. It is easy to believe St Francis de Sales never forgot these practical lessons. In later life he was indulgent and compassionate to be sure, but he kept strict accounts, as may be seen by the examples cited by Msgr Picard.

He learned that in Savoy the peasants often found it difficult to pay their debts on account of the scarcity of money, but that despite the irregularities occasioned by this, it was important to avoid lawsuits. He despised business; figures tormented him, and he insisted that he knew nothing about them because his charity upset the best accounts. Nevertheless, he insisted that people either meet their just obligations or make formal arrangements for prolonging them. Likewise he was scrupulous in ful-

filling his administrative duties, and never allowed himself any laxity in meeting his obligations to his sovereign. His reputation for integrity was such that often he was asked to serve as arbiter. At Thorens he gave his decisions in the kitchen, he even continued to perform this service after he became Bishop of Annecy, for he always kept himself easily accessible to all. And it happened more than once that when he had given a decision both parties went away satisfied, something that no one had ever known to happen before. There are several examples of this practical side of his character, and of his knowledge of business in the "Introduction to a Devout Life," especially in chapter thirty-three in part three:

"We are likely," he writes, "to find fault with our neighbors for trifling shortcomings and to overlook serious faults in ourselves. We want to get a good price when we sell and to buy cheaply; we want others to be dealt with severely when they are in trouble, but for ourselves we desire mercy and patience. We expect our word to be accepted unquestioningly, but we are upish and unpleasant when it comes to accepting someone else's word. . ." Again: "Invariably we prefer the rich to the poor, although the former are neither more devout nor more virtuous than the latter; we are even better disposed toward those who are better dressed. We demand our rights to the very letter, but we expect others to be courteous in foregoing theirs; we insist upon our privileges punctiliously, but we wish others to be condescending or humble. In fine, we complain readily about the shortcomings of others but we expect them to bear patiently with ours.

What we do for our neighbor always appears great in our own eyes but we think slightingly of any service he may render us. . ." He concludes with this definite advice: "Philothea, be just and fair in all your actions; always put yourself in your neighbor's place, and him in yours; thus you will judge fairly. When you are buying consider yourself as selling, and when you are selling view it from the standpoint of the buyer. In this manner, you will buy and sell justly. . ."

From the mullioned windows of the castle of Thorens he could see "pigeons abandoning their crumbs to sparrows and withdrawing discreetly while the weaker birds fed." His knowledge of the flora and the fauna of his country, which inspired those frequent similes which enliven his style, was not gained from books but from direct contact with and observation of nature at a time of life when he was best qualified to see it clearly and freshly.

CHAPTER III

ADOLESCENCE

WHEN Francis left Annecy his record was such that his father was sure he would become the pride of the family, so he was sent to Paris to complete his education. "In Paris," our Saint said later, "I took several courses to please my father, but I studied theology for my own pleasure." Already he was thinking seriously of the priesthood, and was more likely to be found in churches than in more worldly places. At one time, he considered exterior piety most important. An instance of this he recounts in his own inimitable way; the story has all the brilliant, lucid grace of Anatole France, not of the perverse Anatole France, but the honest, unaffected author of "Le Livre de Mon Ami."

"When I was in Paris and still quite young," he writes, "I decided that I would make myself perfect and flawless. My first step was in arriving at the conclusion that I ought to hold my head on one side while saying my office, because a companion of mine who was really very pious used to do so. I followed this practice for some time without, however, increasing my devoutness." He soon renounced this mannerism forever. Never did he show the slightest affectation, nor was he solicitous about outward appearances.

It was during these youthful years that he suffered the worst temptation of his life indeed of any life — despair. He imagined that God was abandoning him, that he would never be able to rise to God from the abyss of his own nothingness. He concluded that he would not be numbered among the elect. An old biography, written anonymously and published in Paris in 1689 by *Robert Pepie, St James Street, at the statue of St Basil above the Saint-Severin Fountain,* gives a quaint version of this temptation; it has also the added merit of containing a bibliography of all the lives of the Saint published before this date in Italy:

"He was living in peaceful tranquillity when the devil came to trouble the repose of his soul. He convinced the Saint that all his good works were useless, that he was destined to be among the condemned. St Francis de Sales, thinking his damnation an assured fact, became terribly frightened. Loving God with his whole heart, his anguish at the thought that he would be compelled to hate God eternally was extreme. This anguish, combined with his fear of the sufferings of hell, left him profoundly dejected. His face became thin and drawn; all night long he would weep, and in the day time scarcely had enough strength left to eat. At length it occurred to him that our Blessed Mother is the last resource of despairing sinners, and that he should turn to her. Hastening to the church of St Etienne-des-Gres, he prostrated himself before an image of the Virgin Mother, and begged her to obtain for him the grace of loving God, at least during this life, since it was his unhappy lot to be doomed

to hate God throughout eternity. Immediately, the gracious Mother of God delivered him from his cruel temptation and agony, and restored to him his peace of mind."

When she testified in the proceedings which led to the canonization of St Francis de Sales, Madame de Chantal told the story as she heard it from the Saint's own lips. It is more accurate:

"To comfort me when I was in trouble, that blessed soul once told me that as a student in Paris he had suffered a terrible temptation which had caused him deep anguish. It seemed to him that he was damned, that salvation for him was impossible. The thought paralyzed him with fear. . . Notwithstanding his excessive suffering, he never lost his determination to love God with all his strength. Since that ineffable happiness would be denied him hereafter, he resolved to spare no effort to increase his fidelity to God in this life. For three weeks or more, he suffered so violently that he could neither eat nor sleep. He became thin and the color of wax. Passing before a church one day, he entered and prostrated himself before an altar to Our Lady where he saw the prayer "Memorare" mounted on a card. Invoking the tender Mother of God in the burning words of the great St Bernard, he arose completely cured, his affliction having fallen from him like a leper's scale."

Both the Abbé Baudry, in his "Véritable esprit de St François de Sales" and the Abbé Brémond, in his "Histoire du sentiment religieux," attach great importance to this crisis of despair, terminating as it did in a sudden transport of confidence and peace. Because it is less dra-

matic than Pascal's despair, less compact, and lacks the warmth of Pascal's adoration, this experience of St Francis de Sales is perhaps even more significant than his. It was the point of departure for a new doctrine of confidence and love.

"Picture this pious, timorous young student," writes the Abbé Brémond, "when he first comes face to face with the doctrine of predestination, attributed to that master of masters, St Thomas Aquinas. He discovers what he had perhaps confusedly feared, namely, that certain souls are created for the sole end of demonstrating by an eternity of suffering the infallibility of divine justice. Such a doctrine, at least so it appears to me, must always seem terrifying, but it was doubly more so to one endowed with such a concrete and realistic mind as St Francis de Sales; to a scrupulous soul, tormented by temptations peculiar to that age, who was only too ready to number himself among those predestined to hell. . ."

With perdition looming before him, with feelings wavering between courage and despair, he kneels at the feet of our Blessed Lady to implore her assistance. Offering himself as an expiatory victim, he bows before the terrible will of God, asking as his only consolation that he may love God in this world. Instantly calmness, confidence, and peace return. It was either that evening or somewhat later that he wrote down a confession of faith in which he recorded the voice he had heard as having said:

"As a reward for your willingness to sacrifice yourself to My honor and glory in order thus to manifest My perfection, I shall accord you eternal happiness that, singing

My praises, you may give Me the only glory that is dear to Me. Your acceptance of this suffering reflected only a slight glory on Me, for *I do not aspire to destroy but to save men.*" Let us not forget the phrase: *I do not aspire to destroy but to save men.* In it is the essence of St Francis de Sales' doctrine. The Abbé Brémond refers to this protestation of faith as a "precious relic, less tense perhaps and less passionate than Pascal's but of a higher spiritual order."

Three of the most distinguished authorities on Pascal, M. Victor Giraud, M. Fortunat Strowski, and M. James Chevalier, agree in describing Pascal's vision as "the burning memory of an ecstatic night." That was the famous night of November 23, 1654, when Pascal felt certitude descending upon him like the tongues of fire on the Apostles at Pentecost. The dramatic element is lacking in St Francis' experience. With him there is only the pure water of his tears, yet in them is reflected the glory of Heaven.

When he recovered from that frightful agony which so nearly destroyed him, body and soul, he was better able to understand the great movement of humanity not towards death but towards life. Never again did he allow himself to be paralyzed by a too great scrupulousness or by indecision. And in Catholicism he found a reservoir of strength and consolation for every trial, for every exigency of daily life. St Vincent de Paul said that he followed "the adorable Providence step by step." Henceforth he abandoned himself to divine direction and in that surrender he found the fullness of his own will.

He trained and subjugated his will, increasing its strength a hundred fold by exercises, rules, and examinations of conscience. "Before going out," he wrote, "everyone is careful to examine himself in a mirror; but no one examines his conscience."

After this temptation, St Francis de Sales plotted out in the most minute detail just how his time should be spent. Each day he accomplished a maximum. Perhaps his greatest charity was his generosity in permitting others to encroach upon his time, the value of which he so fully realized. Never would he deny himself to anyone who wanted to see him, nor would he limit the time allowed any visitor. To the poor in spirit, the oppressed, or suffering, he was prodigal with his precious hours, and he gilded them with gracious words, advice, and patience.

After six years of study in Paris, he returned to Savoy. Then his father sent him to Padua to study law and thus round out his education. There his companions plotted to put an end to his virtue which, for all that he was friendly and unobtrusive, scandalized them "in a young man of his age," to use the words of the old chronicler, "living in this dangerous land where debauchery was looked upon as a necessary ingredient in the character of even the most virtuous of men."

They got in touch with a famous Neapolitan courtesan and, telling her that they were going to introduce one of their friends to her, they begged her "to use every means in her power to gain his affection." They then induced the young Count de Sales to go with them by

pretending that they were going to call upon a famous lawyer who was passing through the city, and took him to a house where this woman received him "with all the charms of a young lady whose sole object in life is to be attractive and alluring."

They introduced her as the lawyer's daughter, and she pretended merely to be entertaining him while her father was closeted with some important noblemen. One by one his companions withdrew on different pretexts until Francis, left entirely alone, suggested postponing his interview until later. "With perfect demureness the courtesan asked him to stay a bit longer. She had been told how pure he was, and as she saw that he was embarrassed she continued to talk as modestly as before. Shortly, however, she raised her eyes to meet his and gradually he came to realize what her designs were. "But such was his extreme calm and dignity that she in turn became embarrassed and lost all power of seduction. He had no difficulty in politely withdrawing."

Sensual temptation did not play so dangerous a role in St Francis de Sales' youth as intellectual anguish. His keen powers of observation, and his acuteness in sizing up people, as well as the fact that he indulged but little in the pleasures of frivolous society, made it relatively easy for him to avoid even the most cleverly laid snares of women. An Italian princess "attracted by his kindly bearing," had pursued him and had sent her servants to spy upon his movements so that she might more skillfully plan her mode of conquest. But her effort to attract him failed lamentably. Even the utmost prudence, however, and

the use of every precaution could not entirely shield him from these determined people, and all his life he had to be on his guard. However, suspicion never besmirched his reputation save once, and then under circumstances which reflect no credit on the Duke of Nemours, his suzerain. This incident I shall relate later.

At Padua, as a result of the mortification that he imposed on himself to develop and strengthen his love of God, such as fasting and wearing a hair-cloth, he became so weakened that his life was endangered. Fearing that he might soon die, he made a will in which he bequeathed his body to the doctors for autopsy "in order that having rendered no service to the public during life, mankind might benefit by his death." Thus did he hope to aid anatomical discoveries.

He studied literature, science, law, and theology intensively. In order to improve his prose he studied Montaigne, and it was at this time that he developed his style. His critics usually picture him as a most painstaking writer, self-conscious, exact in detail, careful that every word is just right, ornamenting his sentences with alluring word pictures intermingled with sugary metaphors. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Not long ago M. Francis Vincent wrote a doctor's thesis entitled: "The Style of St Francis de Sales in the light of the corrections he made on the Introduction to a Devout Life." He expressed regret that he had been unable to find the rough draughts for this work. Let him be reassured; there is little likelihood that there were any rough draughts. In the first place, the "In-

troduction" was merely a collection of letters of spiritual direction which he had written to Madame de Charmoisy and several other ladies. These he gathered together and arranged in the form of a treatise. He revised them from edition to edition because he was really an excellent writer, and an excellent writer is never satisfied with what he has done. These changes were, however, rapid corrections of slight importance, such as are made hastily on proofs. I believe it was M. Abel Hermant who observed that an author's style is in no essential way altered by revision; it may be improved, but the first draught is either well or badly written; the first draughts of manuscripts by Chateaubriand and Flaubert are as distinctly in their own individual styles as the last.

In this connection St Francis de Sales once wrote: "One should use simple, homely words; likewise the transition between ideas should be simple and readily grasped by all." Superficial appearances to the contrary, he rebelled against the over-ornate style affected by his contemporaries. Another instance of this is to be found in the biography from which I have already quoted:

"Francis de Sales," we read, "warned preachers to avoid that easy facility in speaking which the worldly refer to as eloquence. He advised them to avoid the tricks of rhetoric, and to move their audiences not by shouting at them and waving their arms, but by letting them sense the inner excitement and fervor of the speaker, and never to attempt to gain the sympathy of an audience except by convincing it by sound argument. . . He advised them against using puns or making parenthetical com-

ments upon the words of Holy Scripture to demonstrate the brilliancy of the speaker's mind. . . A sermon is excellent, he insisted, when its hearers come away from it mute, looking at each other in silence, and when instead of praising the preacher, they think only of the picture he has made for them of their disorders and of the need they have of changing their lives."

His books were not premeditated works on abstract subjects; each was written with a definite, practical goal in mind. His "Controversies" and the "Standard of the Holy Cross," for instance, were planned for his missions in Protestant countries. He would have given his life, he said, to redeem Geneva. The "Introduction to a Devout Life" was written for the guidance of people living in the world, and particularly those in the married state, whereas the "Treatise on the Love of God" was drawn up for the Visitandines. And these books were written from day to day, while he was walking, or on mule-back, in the evening after a hard day's work, or in his study in his episcopal palace where people were forever coming in and out; they were written piecemeal and without consecutiveness. The unity of his thought sufficed to link the chapters. Few writers have led a less scholarly and sedentary life than he, yet he knew Latin thoroughly and all the secrets of his mother tongue which was spoken very well in Savoy.

"Savoy," declared Sainte-Beuve more than two centuries later, "is one of the countries bordering on France where French is best spoken, where it is spoken with the most simplicity, clearness, and naturalness." Vaugelas, son of

President Favre, a Savoyard, was the first French grammarian. Our Saint appropriated many rich and colorful expressions from the dialect spoken by the peasants. The outstanding qualities of his prose are purity, picturesqueness, clarity, and a kindly humor. In his definition of beauty in the "Treatise on the Love of God" St Francis de Sales numbers among its attributes, stateliness and clarity, adding to them, however, charm and gracefulness, "for beauty in a living being is more than the sum of a number of parts, each perfect in itself, harmoniously arranged; it must include also a supple grace and charm and poise, which are the soul of beauty in all things animate." And in his own prose we find precisely that charm and grace and poise, "the soul of beauty in all things animate," which accounts so largely for its supple vitality. Early in life he came to realize that to write well is one of the surest means of accomplishing things, since one writes to be read. When he was learning to write, he felt that he was merely learning another method of getting things done. But it was as natural for him to write well as it is for most people to write badly. His writing is neither labored nor stilted; his style is the same in both his letters and his books. It is possible for one to be elegant so consistently that elegance becomes part of one, and ceases to be an acquired characteristic.

St Francis de Sales exploited his ability to the full for the glory of God, but there was not a trace of literary vanity in him. Once when he was preaching in Paris he had to pronounce a panegyric on St Martin; a large audience had gathered, not because they were interested

in St Martin, but because of his reputation as a preacher. Perceiving this, St Francis de Sales confined himself to an enumeration of the Saint's virtues, and carefully avoided his own style of speaking; whenever he found himself about to utter a phrase that might sound striking he changed the wording so that his listeners might not be tempted to substitute the preacher for the sermon. Likewise, once on a mission in Chablais he preached for two or three peasants with the same painstaking care and zeal he would have exercised before a crowd. A Protestant minister was converted by this humility. He reported to the Saint "that he came to the church when he heard the sermon bell, and seeing only a few peasants assembled, he said to himself: 'If the provost is preaching for the honor and glory of God, he will give his instructions just the same; but if he is preaching for his own glory, he will disdain so small an audience. He will not preach, and that will prove to me that he is only a charlatan who babbles lies.' Consequently, he was very much edified to hear our Saint preach as eloquently as if he had before him the most brilliant assemblage. . ."

The University of Padua was famous all over Europe. After two years study, young Francis de Sales received his doctor's degree. The original of the letters patent conferring the degree on him is preserved in the archives of the chateau at Thorens. This quaint document is in a florid and bombastic Italian style which rings rather pleasantly in one's ears.

"The old and illustrious city of Padua," we read, "ele-

vates a student to the supereminent rank of doctor only after this merit has been earned by much labor and study, and only after he has been judged worthy of this honor by a severe examination following an honorable and difficult struggle." Surely, this declaration on a diploma must have made the parents of those young doctors rejoice.

Our doctor then returned to Savoy. Imagine the welcome accorded him in the castle at La Thuile on the shore of Lake Annecy where his parents were living! They had not seen him for a long time. In those days, sentimentality was not allowed to interfere with a boy's education. Fathers and mothers did their duty and trusted in God. M. de Boisy had great faith in his eldest son. He pictured him shedding a new lustre on his family. He had planned to have his son enter the Senate of Savoy, as his intensive legal training had fitted him for such a position, and had selected a charming fiancée for him, Frances Suchet, the only daughter of Seigneur de Veigy and an heiress of considerable wealth. These elaborate projects saddened Francis. He desired neither marriage nor political honors, but only to serve God.

But, in obedience to his father, he went to Sallanches to see the young lady, but forgot, however, to look at her. "She deserves a better partner in life than me," he assured his father on his return. Then, sure at last of his vocation, he acquainted his father with the fact. This news was a cruel blow to M. de Boisy, and it required a certain courage to break it to him.

In the education of his son, this estimable father had

spared nothing. After maintaining him in Padua and Paris, were all the hopes of the de Sales family to be shattered now ? How sad, and perhaps afraid, this loving son must have been at having thus to oppose his father's wishes and risk his anger, for in those days the slightest deviation from a parent's will caused a terrible conflict. When Bernard de Menthon was being forced into marriage, he made his escape by jumping from a window on the eve of his wedding. Yet with Francis all went smoothly. M. de Boisy was proud of his name, but he was also a good Catholic. He bowed in submission, therefore, to the will of his son, even going so far as to give him his blessing. To grasp the full magnitude of this act, we must remember that the whole future of the family depended upon Francis. As for his mother, she had already secretly prepared a cassock for her son.

The young priest was appointed provost of the Chapter of St Peter. Again, out of consideration for the prestige of the family, M. de Boisy sought to induce his son to accept the office of senator. But, with a gentleness that concealed an inflexible determination the young provost refused, alleging as his reason that one cannot serve two masters, and that his Master fulfilled all his desires. Modern priests who waste their time in politics, literature, or sociology, may profitably recall this answer. St Francis de Sales delivered his first sermon on the Real Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist, and ever afterwards, his sole aim was to seek the good of souls, not success as an orator. He wanted all to grasp what he said, so therefore he was simple, clear, direct, cordial,

and, as a consequence, he exerted a profound influence from the first. From all quarters crowds flocked to hear him. He convinced the doubting; he inflamed the lukewarm; he conquered the incredulous.

M. de Boisy, alone, was dissatisfied. He thought that his son was too prodigal of his talents, that he was making a mistake in speaking plainly and simply, instead of taking refuge in the obscure phraseology and ringing grandiloquence that it was his privilege as a learned doctor to affect. St Francis de Sales related this misapprehension in a letter to his friend, Msgr Camus, Bishop of Belley:

"I had the best father who ever lived, but, having passed the greater part of his life at Court and at war, he knew military strategy and diplomacy better than he knew theology. While I was provost, I preached on every possible occasion, in the cathedral, in parish churches, and even before small, informal gatherings. Attracted by the frequent ringing of the sermon bell, my good father inquired who was preaching. 'Who would it be, but your son ?' he was asked in return. He called me aside one day, and said:

" 'Provost, you are preaching too often. Why, I hear the sermon bell ringing even on week days. . . Now, in my day, it wasn't like that. Preachers were scarcer, but what preachers they were ! God knows, they were learned, well educated men who spoke marvels. They quoted more Latin and Greek in one sermon than you do in ten. They delighted and edified everybody. Crowds poured into their churches. . . But you are making this

practice so common that people no longer attach any importance to it, and they are losing their esteem for you.'" The provost must have smiled at that remonstrance, but his zeal for preaching did not abate. His father came to hear him, and soon took him for his confessor.

CHAPTER IV

HIS VOCATION

ON THE evening of the fourteenth or fifteenth of September, 1594, two pilgrims sought shelter at the fortress of Allinges, that old landmark built on a hill overlooking the whole fertile, delightful plain of Chablais and the long curve of Lake Leman, broken by capes Yvoire and Ripaille. Today this fortress is but a ruin whose half-crumbled walls silhouette picturesquely against the horizon. These pilgrims were Francis and Louis de Sales. Without funds or resources of any kind, and against the wishes of their father, they had set out from Annecy to convert Chablais which was then Protestant. The next morning, the governor, Baron d'Hermance, led them out on the terrace to see the view. Francis, counting the villages spread out before him, gave way to tears at the thought that God had invested him with the responsibility of leading all those souls back to Him. And the governor, not understanding that emotion, was greatly astonished.

I have often stood on that terrace which is suspended above the country-side like a balcony. Memories of St Francis de Sales are so vivid and fresh there that you almost expect to find the mark of his feet upon the grass. This was the beginning; so far his life had con-

sisted in preparation. At last his vocation was actually leading him to the goal. I believe that from that terrace, that autumn morning, he really soared to his chosen work. But no one suspected his wings.

He was a Saint, who, laboring among his own people, was recognized at home only when the whole world had proclaimed his holiness. It is so difficult to believe in the sanctity of a person whom one has known intimately from the time he was a little child, and in whose character you perceived nothing marvellous or strange. Should not a saint be different from everybody else? Let us recall the words of the Gospel: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. . ."

Francis never wanted to leave his own country-side, and never lost his fondness for his native village and for his family. For it was his fate to feel all the bonds of affection natural to ordinary man in order that he might the better sacrifice them. He was consecrated Bishop at Thorens, and Thorens strewed flowers in his path.

He had played in Thorens with the children of the village, and he spoke their dialect. Later this knowledge gave him access to many a close-mouthed, reticent peasant. He had an ardent love for simple country people. When these honest, straight-forward folk happen also to be noble and generous, they far surpass the subtler and more involved inhabitants of cities. His friends were surprised at the interest he took in conversing with peasants. At first they blamed him for wasting his time in this fashion. "Such folk," he explained, "have just as

much need for patience and advice in their affairs as the great in theirs. If a person is disturbed about some relatively unimportant matter, that is no excuse for failing to comfort him. It is not a small thing, moreover, to restore peace to one whom Jesus Christ has redeemed by His Blood."

Thus he made use of the knowledge of country life that he had gained as a child. Likewise the close and harmonious relations between the members of his family helped him to understand others and to console them. In order to offer God the bloody holocaust of the wounded hearts of others, it was necessary for him first to open his own heart to suffering.

Perfect harmony reigned in the chateau at Thorens to which Francis de Sales retired each year to make a few days' retreat. Here in true patriarchal style lived several of his brothers with their families, yet they all got on perfectly with each other. "In truth," he wrote Madame de Chantal from Thorens, "you would be pleased to see such complete concord between persons who are generally so discordant as mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, brothers and brothers-in-law." He contributed to this marvellous harmony. As a child, he had detected a desire for it in his good mother's loving face, and in his father's firm exercise of his authority.

His father's death was his first great sorrow. The shocking news was brought to him as he was about to mount the pulpit. But in spite of this news he ascended the pulpit, and as usual preached on the gospel of the day,

which happened to be the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. No one suspected, until the end, the heavy blow that he had sustained. Finally, however, he acquainted his auditors with the sad news and requested their prayers. He feared the pride of stoicism and did not wish to conceal his suffering. Having done his duty, he gave way to filial grief.

The acceptance of separation and death was general enough in those days, when society as a whole was so deeply religious. When Francis de Sales' father realized that the end was near, he became entirely himself once more. All the people weeping at his bedside provoked him. Calling one of his sons, he said:

"Send these women out. Lift me and give me my armor; it is not fitting that a military man, accustomed to brave death on the field of battle should die on his bed in the presence of weeping women."

A few years ago, General de Sonnaz, a member of an old Savoy family who had held important military posts in Italy, faced death in similar fashion. He had himself dressed in his uniform and a glass of champagne brought; then lifting his glass in honor of the king, he fell back dead. If it is true, as Goethe said, that we die only by the infirmity of our wills, then these old men must have made death recoil.

This dramatic acceptance of death savors somewhat of ostentation, whereas the service of God requires more simplicity. Francis' father, therefore, renounced his plan and requested a crucifix. Blessing his assembled children, he begged them to respect Francis as their new

father. After which, he calmly awaited the end, which came on April 5, 1601.

Before the war, a newspaper started an inquiry among doctors to obtain their opinions as to whether or not a patient who is fatally ill should be warned of his approaching death. All, save one, prescribed a lie as a duty to humanity. "Men are of the opinion," says Pascal, "that since they cannot cure death, suffering, or ignorance, they are happier in not thinking of them. That is the only remedy they can invent to assuage such sorrows." The lone exception in the inquiry mentioned above was an Englishman of the Indian service who had spent his life with the army and frequently had fought epidemics. He boldly admitted to his more timorous colleagues: "After sixty years of practice I will say frankly that never have I allowed death to overtake a patient without his knowledge."

This is the Christian idea. Death can be a final ascent or a redemption. Time does not count. All eternity may be bound up in an instant. And in those days it never occurred to anyone that it was permissible to hide from a man the knowledge that he was about to die. Consider the family of Ste Jeanne de Chantal in Burgundy. There courageous Christian habits were dominant. Her grandfather, a most cultivated and dignified old man of seventy-five, realizing that death was at hand, had himself placed upon a mule, and went to announce the news to his relatives and to bid them good-bye. He returned home, received the last sacraments and heard mass; he then set forth on his last journey. The father

of Jeanne de Chantal, President Frémyot, was no less admirable. When this loved daughter left him to follow the vocation which called her to found the Visitation, he bade her:

"Go, my dear daughter; go where God is calling you. If it should happen that I shall never see you again in this world, I shall die happy knowing that you are in the house of God. I am sure that, by your prayers, you will sustain the declining years of the father who permits your departure. . ." Overcome with emotion, he mastered his feelings with an effort, and continued: "Let these tears cease to flow that we may give greater honor to the holy will of God, and lest the world think that our constancy is shaken."

Half a century later, Jacqueline Pascal, the future Sister Ste Euphemia, left the paternal roof for the cloister with the same strong-willed courage. According to her sister, Madame Périer, "She arose, dressed, and went away as she would have done under ordinary circumstances, with poise and tranquillity. We did not say good-bye for fear that we might break down, and I turned away when I saw that she was ready to start."

Such instances of people keeping strong emotions under control are edifying, but Francis de Sales was fearful lest stoicism of this sort become a blind for a deep-seated pride. He did not mind giving in to the very human desire to grieve and mourn, as long as that inner firmness of will was not lessened thereby.

Such families as the de Sales and the Frémyots were not rare in those days. Life was often stormy, charged

with violence and brutal passion, sometimes even with injustice; nor was it always characterized by a longing for God. Death, however, brought in its wake repentance, peace, and majesty.

Just before his death, M. de Boisy requested that his lands remain intact and that all his children should share equally in them. He did this to bind them closer to one another and to avoid the fate common to most large families when the estate dwindles into insignificance after being divided between all the heirs. Some of them, however, wished to divide the property. The wife of Louis de Sales even protested against the clause in the will which gave the youngest the first choice in the event of a division of the lands. Francis restored peace and harmony in the family. In this instance, he had another opportunity to draw lessons from real life, and if the "Introduction to a Devout Life" is a breviary of conjugal and family life, it is because his teaching is as closely linked with experience as our flesh is knitted to our bones.

He witnessed the death of many of those closest to him — his little sister Jeanne, his mother, his brother, and the latter's wife, eldest daughter of Madame de Chantal. On each of these occasions, he bowed down before the will of God. Jeanne was the last born. Madame de Chantal, who loved her like one of her own daughters, had taken her with her to Burgundy, and it was there she died. On receiving the news of this Francis de Sales wrote to Madame de Chantal as follows:

"You may imagine how devotedly I loved this little girl. I baptized her with my own hands. She was the

first creature over whom I exercised my sacerdotal power. I was her spiritual father and I promised myself great things for her. . . But, nevertheless, my dear daughter, human though I am, and though I felt her death keenly, I am conscious of a sense of peace, of calmness, a certain inner tranquillity which divine Providence has blessed me with in this moment of sorrow. . . My good mother drank this chalice with a truly Christian fortitude and while I have always had a high opinion of her virtues, they have proved greater even than I had thought. Sunday morning she sent for my brother, the canon, and, because the day before she had noticed that he and all my other brothers had been very sad, she said:

" 'I dreamed last night that my daughter Jeanne was dead. Tell me, I beg of you, is it not true?'

"My brother, who was awaiting my arrival that I might break the news to her, accepted this opportunity to offer her the cup of bitterness. Grateful that she had not yet risen, he briefly answered:

" 'It is true, mother.' He could say no more.

" 'May God's will be done,' said my good mother, and she wept freely for a time. Calling her maid, she said:

" 'I wish to dress and to go to the chapel to pray for my poor child.'

"She did so immediately. Not a word of impatience, not a glance of annoyance. She blessed God a thousand times, and a thousand times she resigned herself to His holy will. Never have I seen sorrow better controlled. Although her grief was intense, it was the result of great tenderness, untainted by the least show of pride. This

was her very dear child. Well, should I not be devoted to such a mother ?"

From this letter we can easily reconstruct the scene. The messenger from Madame de Chantal brings the news. The brothers hold a consultation. Francis, the eldest, who alone can soften the blow, is absent. They must wait until he arrives before breaking the sad news to their mother. Madame de Boisy, however, has guessed that something mysterious is happening — these whispered consultations, this involuntary sadness which no one can disguise, portend something. Evening comes and they all retire. The poor woman cannot sleep; she dreams of the absent, of the Bishop, of Jeanne. It is Jeanne, she is sure. The next morning she questions the other priest in the family, who, seeing that she has a presentiment of what has happened, tells her the truth. Every witness that we have testifies to the tenderness of Madame de Boisy. Nevertheless, she did not complain against fate. Her faith lifted her instantly above even her sorrow. She bowed in submission and arose to seek comfort and strength in prayer.

When she in turn died peacefully, Francis wrote to his confidante, Madame de Chantal: "Let us confess, my dearly beloved daughter, let us confess that God is good; His mercy is eternal." He made an act of faith when God sent him tribulation. Whenever sorrow afflicted him, he would first praise the providence of God, then admit his suffering.

"As for me, my dear daughter," he wrote, "I feel this separation keenly for, after I have glorified the goodness

of God, I must confess my own weakness, but nevertheless, my daughter, my sorrow though deep was calm, for after David I repeated: 'I was dumb, and I opened not my mouth, because Thou hast done it.' Except for that, I would have cried out loudly at this heavy blow, but it did not seem to me that I dare cry out or manifest any discontent under the blows of a Paternal Hand which, in truth, thanks to His goodness, I have learned to love tenderly from my youth."

That heart of his, so profound and so delicate, was to be harrowed by every variety of suffering. He had to suffer himself before he could speak truthfully of it, and console others by showing them how to weigh their trials correctly in the light of eternity. His younger brother, Bernard, who had married the eldest daughter of Madame de Chantal and had thus added a visible bond to our Saint's friendship with this pious lady, was unexpectedly carried off by contagious fever while crossing the Alps to rejoin the army. St Francis de Sales felt this death keenly but he had no leisure to indulge his own sorrow; he had to break the news to the young widow and Madame de Chantal. He told the latter first.

With extreme tenderness he reminded the widow of a vow that both she and her husband had made. Because they were convinced that their love for each other was unique, and that never would they find a substitute for it, they had vowed that whichever one should survive the other would enter either a convent or a monastery, as the case might be. She listened to him in astonishment; no premonition of coming disaster helped her to sense the

significance of his allusions. She was a young woman of twenty-one, blessed with the most charming of husbands, whom she adored, and even then was expecting the fruit of their love. She had every right to look forward to a future of happiness — and in one fell blow she was to lose all. Commending himself to God's gracious guidance, he completed his sad task:

"The agreement which at the time of your husband's departure was only a vague project for the future is now an agreement sealed and ratified; Bernard has found what his heart desired. Your part of the contract remains to be fulfilled."

"Ah ! I understand, Father," replied the young wife, "my husband is dead." She fainted, but upon regaining consciousness, she bravely accepted her cross.

"My God," she murmured tremblingly, "henceforth I am entirely Thine." Her bruised heart, pierced by unutterable anguish, was a fitting holocaust to offer God.

"Lord," she prayed, "soon I shall serve Thee alone. The only link that binds me to this world is the little creature whom Thy hands have fashioned and who is yet to be born. Grant it the grace of baptism; then dispose of mother and child according to Thy holy will."

God had pity on her. The child lived only long enough to receive baptism, and the mother was soon seized with an illness which was recognized as mortal. She wished to become a member of the Order of the Visitation before her death, so the bishop received her as a novice and then allowed her to pronounce her vows in

the presence of the assembled community. After that the young nun died happy.

She had always called her brother-in-law, father, a name that ever seemed to fit him. The boatmen on Lake Annecy always addressed him by that title, and he preferred it to that of Monseigneur. His flock he always looked upon merely as a larger family. The beautiful family life he had known had developed in him a gracious understanding which was reflected in the patent sincerity of whatever he said, and in a sympathy which yearned to soothe every sorrow and pain. He would not be the St Francis de Sales we know had he not undergone the joys and sorrows inseparable to living in a large and united family, and had his emotional life not been so full and deep. He would be a different saint; he would not be the intelligent consoler, the tenderly authoritative father, the restorer of family spirit, the healer of hidden wounds.

CHAPTER V

THE BISHOP OF GENEVA VISITS RIPAILLE WITH THE BISHOP OF BELLEY

ANNECY is only eight or ten miles distant from Belley. In 1609, St Francis de Sales consecrated a youthful ecclesiastic of twenty-six, Msgr John Peter Camus, for the See of Belley. Although in his day this young bishop was considered an excellent orator and a famous writer, his name had been largely forgotten, until M. Henri Brémond brought it to light again in *"L'Histoire du sentiment religieux en France."* While he wrote more than two hundred volumes, many of them novels, only one is read today, *"L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales."*

He saw a great deal of his neighbor. "I was so young when I was called to the episcopate," he remarked, "that I found myself in the position of being appointed captain almost as soon as I enrolled in the ecclesiastical militia, with the result that I was new to my duties and in the dark as to what to do." When any difficulty presented itself, he consulted the Bishop of Geneva, dispatching a little lackey whom he retained for the sole purpose of sending questions to his friend and obtaining his answers, which were oracular.

On one occasion when several companies of infantry were quartered in the vicinity of Belley, their officers requested permission of Bishop Camus for their men to eat eggs and cheese during Lent; both of which were forbidden at that time. The young bishop found the situation very embarrassing. So the little lackey set out for Annecy. He came back with this brusque response:

"By all means permit these good people to eat not only eggs but even chicken, and as for cheese, why let them have meat too if they wish it. . . Is it not enough for them to submit to the Church, deferentially asking its leave and its blessing ?"

Even when his own reputation was firmly established, Msgr Camus did not cease to think of Francis de Sales as his advisor and mentor. In this he bore witness to his own good sense for he lacked the good taste, the moderation, and the resolution of his neighbor. Later on he was branded as a Jansenist and the author of obscene novels by a group of bigots who, as is their custom, were quick to insult him and threaten him with excommunication. More wise than they, St Francis de Sales was tolerant toward his novels which, moreover, are highly edifying, if somewhat naïve.

In his discussion of "Callitrope" Msgr Henri Brémond somewhat arbitrarily seeks to establish that it is a romanticized biography, and that Bishop Camus himself was the original of the hermit, Artémius, who, from early childhood has been devoted to a beautiful young girl, refraining, however, from asking her hand in marriage because of his poverty. She, as poor as he, seeks refuge

from the importunities of a rich old man and flees to a convent. Artémius "suddenly learns that his friend has left the convent, so he attempts to seek her out again. But his efforts are in vain. She has nothing for him but a sermon, an excellent one at that. Worn out at last by the struggle, she marries the old man."

As a matter of fact, Bishop Camus did want to flee from the world and enter a Carthusian monastery. But later in life he vigorously opposed certain religious orders in which he detected abuses. Perhaps it was to calm him and make him more reasonable that Francis de Sales suggested that when he was visiting Annecy they should pay a visit together to the Carthusian monastery at Ripaille.

The bishop of Geneva helped him learn to preach, working out for him a system for improving himself, and advising him in regard to his reading and his conduct.

"He impressed upon him," writes the anonymous Italian biographer, "that the most important prerequisite for a preacher is that he lead a good life. A preacher should see to it that his own life is above reproach; not only should he avoid mortal sin, but venial sin as well. He should be wary, too, of certain actions which, while not necessarily sinful in themselves, betray a lack of devoutness, such, for example, as frequenting fashionable society where as a rule only worldly matters are discussed and it is easy to fall into unedifying habits of speech. Francis de Sales pointed out that it is difficult to respect a priest, who, having pledged himself to a life of holiness, consorts freely with frivolous or immoral people,

sharing their distractions and amusements and even indulging in pleasures entirely out of keeping with his vocation. It is difficult to avoid drawing unfavorable conclusions about the sincerity of such a priest, and when one hears him preach, instead of taking his counsel to heart, one is more likely to marvel at the adroit casuistry which permits him thus publicly to proclaim his love of God while his actions would indicate that he loved the world even more." There always have been, and still are, such priests who gad about in fashionable society and indulge in pleasures out of keeping with their vocations.

This advice was perhaps not entirely wasted on Bishop Camus, young as he was and much sought after by the hospitable inhabitants of Bugey and Belley, where even yet they know the art of living well and where the art of conversation after a well-appointed dinner is still appreciated.

Bishop Camus' admiration for his distinguished neighbor was like that of a school boy for a well-liked master; so thoroughly did he take his advice to heart that he began to imitate him. St Francis de Sales spoke simply, slowly, almost hesitantly. The effectiveness of what he said was due to the substance of his discourse and to a certain persuasiveness in his manner, not to any superficial cleverness or dexterity. The Bishop of Belley, on the other hand, was a natural-born orator, quick, colorful and with a contagious enthusiasm. When Francis de Sales became aware of the change in his friend's preaching, he chided him for it; simply and gently, as was his

wont. Jean Pierre Camus recounts the scene in his book:

"'They tell me that you have taken to mimicing the Bishop of Geneva when you preach.'

"I parried that with the question:

"'Well, have I chosen a bad model ?'

"'Oh, certainly not !' he answered. 'As a matter of fact, he does not preach badly, but the worst of it is, I am told that you imitate him so badly. . . In spoiling the Bishop of Belley, you do not do justice to the Bishop of Geneva. . .'

What an exquisite scene ! St Francis de Sales then went on to compare their two styles:

"I do everything in my power to get myself going; I keep goading myself to speak faster, but the harder I try the slower I seem to go. I have difficulty finding the right words, and still greater difficulty in pronouncing them. . . I cannot get either myself or my audience aroused. You progress with sails flying while I struggle with my oars; you fly, whereas I creep and crawl like a tortoise. You have more fire and enthusiasm in the end of your little finger than I have in my whole body. And now, you are weighing your words and speaking deliberately, you are drawing out your sentences; you are fading away, and your audiences with you." Doubtless he was being too modest, but he was quite right in advising Bishop Camus to stick to his own style.

Once when our Saint was entertaining his neighbor at Annecy, he took him on an excursion through Chablais and along the shores of Lake Leman. Among other places, they visited the chateau at Ripaille, which had been

turned into a monastery again after a history so varied and interesting that it warrants telling, even at the expense of digressing from our story.

"You do not know beauty if you have not seen Thonon and Ripaille," runs an old Savoyard adage. Local patriotism, no doubt, willingly exaggerates; otherwise there would be no excuse for its existence. This time, however, the exaggeration is slight. The traveller who traverses the length of Lake Leman views an incomparable landscape, graceful, gentle, appealing. In the foreground, the shimmering blue of the lake, then the rolling green plains of Chablais, hemmed in by the gentle contours of the nearby mountains, wooded to their very summits, while, farther off, the stark, white peaks of mountains are like a fringe of lace against the cloudless sky, and in the evening like lanterns seem to catch the fire from the setting sun. What better spot in which to cultivate a contemplative turn of mind than amidst the limpid, transparent atmosphere of this blessed place!

But it is in the autumn above all other seasons that one is conscious of the full enchantment of this magic scenery. The strong, rich harmonies of its blended colors temper the exuberant gaiety that summer has lavished so profusely; the light, re-echoing laughter of streams and meadows, plains and mountains, is stilled and in its place one finds the poignant smile, fragile yet voluptuous, of autumn, still unafraid to offer that most intoxicating of all mixtures, the zest of life and consciousness of approaching death.

The chateau at Thonan rises from a plain hollowed out

between two hills, Yvoire, and Ripaille, each of them the site of a castle, famous in history. But the castle of Ripaille is more celebrated because its name has been associated in the French language with a host of festivities and feasts. Formerly the most striking feature of it when seen from the lake was the number of separate structures which it contained and the diversity of their architecture. They were a picturesque and confused group of ancient walls and modern pavilions. Between the ruins of the old castle built by the Duke of Savoy, Amadeus VIII, and a dwelling erected by General Dupas, Count of the Empire, rose the convent of the Augustines with its chapel in the centre. The façade of that quaint castle was flanked with seven turrets, similarly constructed and surrounded by heavy battlements which ran half way up the mass of the central buildings.

But an ill-advised owner has had that old convent demolished. Impelled by a magnificent zeal for historical reconstruction, he has taxed his ingenuity in his effort to make a careful confusion of the ducal castle, that incongruous medley of priory, fortress and hunting-park, which so faithfully recalled the past and preserved, under the ravages of time and clumsy rejuvenations, its air of an old parent inclined to tell stories. That old convent, had it a voice, would have related much better than I can possibly do, the visit of the Bishops of Geneva and of Belley to Ripaille.

The land surrounding the castle has changed but little. There are still the same vines running all the way down to the lake-shore, and the same magnificent forest of oaks,

some of them said to have been planted by Amadeus VIII, through which run shaded avenues ending in the blue waters of the lake.

Among its other distinctions, Ripaille has seen a pope enthroned. In the little church of the Augustines a pope was installed with all the customary ceremonial as head of the Church. He was not, it is true, a legitimate pope. This event took place in the fifteenth century. Hardly had the great schism of the West ended, reuniting all Christendom under the authority of Martin V, than a new danger menaced the Church. The Council of Basle, assembled in 1431, at the time of the election of Pope Eugene IV, refused to dissolve at the Sovereign Pontiff's behest, declaring the authority of the Council superior to that of the Pope, and, being transformed into a schismatical conventicle, it deposed the new pope. He was branded as "disobedient, opinionated, rebellious, a violator of sacred canons, a destroyer of ecclesiastical unity, scandalous, simoniacal, incorrigible, schismatic, heretical, obdurate, a perjurer, a dissipator of the wealth of the Church, pernicious and damnable."

Already they had begun to call names instead of advancing arguments; one has only to call enough of them and one will impress the common people. Faced with the necessity of replacing the pope whom they had deposed, on the thirtieth of October, 1439, the conventicle of Basle called the Duke of Savoy, Amadeus VIII, to the pontifical throne.

Amadeus VIII had been living in retirement in the castle of Ripaille for five years. Six companions, to

whom he had given the hermit's garb, shared this retreat with him, each one having the use of one of the buildings and a tower. How they employed their time in that secluded spot has been the subject of ardent controversy, not settled even today, between scholars who continue to debate the meaning of the expression: *faire ripaille.* Amadeus VIII and his companions were popularly supposed to overindulge themselves at the table. The phrase, *faire ripaille,* was unknown before this time. They enriched the French language as well as their avid appetites, for since their days this phrase has been synonymous with overeating, and has been much in vogue among French authors, La Fontaine and Voltaire having made frequent use of it.

The sudden elevation of the duke to this high ecclesiastical office was the cause of the unflattering rumors that were subsequently associated with his name. As long as he held only a secular title, he was praised. He was even acclaimed as the Solomon of his day. But as soon as a tiara was placed upon his head, false though it was, he was accused of squandering his declining years in ignominy. He who thought himself a prince of the Church has gone down in history as the king of gourmands.

The monk Rohrbacher in his "History of the Catholic Church" pummels him rudely: "He withdrew," he states, "to that delightful estate at Ripaille to become a hermit, taking with him a dozen other gentlemen. He retained twenty of his own servants to wait upon him, and feasted upon the best of wines and meats; hence,

legend has it, sprang up the expression *faire ripaille.* This was his most memorable accomplishment both as prince and antipope."

But Rohrbacher is as partial as a fond parent. He believes implicitly in the satires of Poggio of Florence and repeats with bitterness Enguerrand de Monstrelet's statements about Amadeus which, at least, were written in a kindly spirit: "He and his friends were served the best wines and meats that could be obtained, instead of eating vegetables and drinking water."

Poggio and Monstrelet, however, are contradicted by other historians including Olivier de la Marche, Raphael Volaterre and particularly Eneas Silvius, who was secretary of the Council of Basle, later becoming pope under the name of Pius II. He gives this report of the election of Amadeus which he himself witnessed at Ripaille:

"One man received more votes than any other candidate. That was the very excellent Amadeus, Duke of Savoy, dean of the Knights of St Maurice of Ripaille in the diocese of Geneva. The electors judged him worthy to govern the Church because he was celibate and was leading the life of a monk."

And after a long eulogy of this prince he adds that "he wore only enough clothes to protect himself from the cold and ate only what was necessary to sustain life."

Thus some represented Amadeus as a sort of monster gorging himself on choice delicacies, and others as an anchorite living on bread and water. How easy it is to form an opinion ! Is not a third version permissible ? Amadeus VIII, living in retirement at Ripaille, was not

obliged to adhere strictly to the penitential practices of monastic life. His table could be well served without ostentation or extravagance. He has simply fallen victim to a popular phrase. Two centuries after him, the expression *faire ripaille* meant merely to enjoy the pleasures of country life. Moréri used it in this sense. Little by little, it lost that meaning and became synonymous with feasting and high living, and consequently the poor Duke was burdened with this unfair reputation. In any event, he could not have chosen a better residence in which to live happily. The lake, the forests, the mountains surrounded him with peace and quiet.

In the midst of this tranquil life, a deputation arrived from the Council of Basle to notify him of his election. He tried to decline, weeping copiously and raising all sorts of objections, among them this astonishing one:

"Must I give up my hermit's beard ?"

At last, he yielded. They convinced him of the authority of the Council. He consented to accept his new responsibilities but without pleasure, ambition, or any taste for the work.

He was consecrated with great pomp at Ripaille on the seventeenth of December 1439, taking the title of Felix V. Seated on his throne on the high altar, the new pope gave solemn benediction after the reading of the decree. Then he left for Basle, taking with him three of his companions of hermitage days. Ten years later, he abdicated and solemnly submitted to the legitimate pope, Nicholas V. He returned to Ripaille and was buried there. In those troublesome times his conduct was sin-

gularly exempt from violence and perfidy. And we must believe that those deluded prelates of Basle elected him because they needed his virtue.

RIPAILLE, its chateau, its monastery and lands had become vacant at the death of Thomas Pobel, Bishop of St Paul. The Duke of Savoy offered it to St Francis de Sales who refused it, requesting instead that he invite there a community of Carthusians; this he did. The two bishops made the journey from Annecy on mules — the Bishop of Geneva visiting his parishes on the way — stopping in Thonon, then proceeding to Ripaille, only a few miles distant. They gained admittance to the monastery without allowing the Superior to be informed of their presence. As they trod the silent corridors of the cloister, they tasted its peace, its solitude.

Pausing before each cell, they read the sentence inscribed over the door — this verse, for example, taken from the Psalmist:

Hæc requies mea in sæculum sæculi,

or these two:

Tu mihi curarum requies, tu nocte vel astra
Lumen et in solis tu mihi turba locis.

And they joyfully commented on these invitations to rest in the Lord. Finally, the Superior, aware of their presence, joined them and paid them the honors of the convent.

On the next day took place one of the most beautiful

events in the life of St Francis de Sales, or rather, one of the events which he himself thought most highly of, for it was the occasion of his being given a lesson by a peasant. The two bishops set out from Ripaille for a neighboring town which I think must have been either Publier or Saint-Paul, one or the other of those charming spots on the Savoyard hillside, above the lake, and so completely enveloped in tall trees that scarcely a steeple even is visible above them. There they spent the night. A native of the place, who was very sick, having heard of the arrival of his pastor, had sent for him in order to go to confession. St Francis de Sales hastened to him. After receiving absolution and the blessing of his Bishop the sick man inquired if he were going to die. As the Saint believed that the patient was fearful at the thought of death, he replied that there was a possibility that he would recover, but that he should trust in God in Whose Hands he was. I shall quote the dialogue that ensued:

"It is not because I fear death that I asked," replied the sick man, "but rather for fear that I may not die."

Francis de Sales thought the man must have some secret sorrow which made life distasteful to him; he begged him, therefore, to confide in him that he might console him.

"I have no sorrow," the dying man rejoined, "and I know of no cause for worry. God has blessed me with sufficient wealth to live in comfort. My wife and children have always been devoted to me, and I am entirely satisfied with their conduct. But, my Lord," he added, sighing, "all the joys which I have just mentioned have

not prevented me from feeling the bitterness of life. I have encountered so many evils, so many different kinds of suffering, and I have learned that true peace is so rare, that if God had not commanded us to remain here until He called us, I should long ago have fled to Him."

Then he spoke to his Bishop of the happiness of Heaven, and of how he had endeavored to keep himself unspotted from this world. He went on to talk in such an extraordinary manner about the life hereafter that St Francis de Sales knew that this was a soul that God had taken particular care to instruct and enlighten. His failing strength diminished; his voice grew weaker; he was given Extreme Unction, and a few minutes later, having thanked the prelate for his kindness, he died peacefully."

Leaving the house, deeply impressed by so beautiful a death, St Francis de Sales rejoined the Bishop of Belley, and with great emotion described to him the scene he had just witnessed. Together they strolled under the trees through the lovely morning sunlight or perhaps they took the road which overhangs Lake Leman like a balcony, whence through the openings between the branches of the trees one can glimpse the blue waters of the lake, spotted occasionally by the triangular sails of the fishing boats. But the Bishop of Geneva, appreciative as he usually was of the beauties of nature, could think only of the serene death he had just witnessed.

A rather prosperous peasant had intuitively sensed the fact that the joys of this world can never completely satisfy us, that eternity alone will give the measure of

happiness we crave. Death, he rightly understood, was not an end but a beginning; not a twilight followed by darkness but a dawn. It ensnares only the ephemeral, not the lasting.

"Behold," thought the two prelates, "the state of the greatest princes of this earth; conquerors and masters of the universe come to the same end; their only lasting advantage is that they are sometimes praised, and even then, as St Augustine put it, one sees them through the centuries like a statue glimpsed from afar, and the praise they receive gives pleasure only to those who are examining them."

Some years later, when St Francis de Sales lay dying in Lyons, he was to drain to the very dregs the cup of life's bitterness. He submitted without complaint to the ministrations of the doctors who, in those days, tortured their patients in the most outlandish manner. In removing a fly-blister that they had applied to his head, "they ripped off nearly all the skin; twice they put hot irons on the nape of his neck, and once they burned the top of his head down to the bone, but he betrayed no evidence of suffering." For him death had no terrors. When the priest who was assisting him uttered these words from the Book of Wisdom: "O Death, how bitter is thy memory !" he completed the quotation himself: "to him who has put his salvation in riches."

Father Jean Fourrier begged him to address God in these words of St Martin: "My God, if I am still necessary to Your people, I do not refuse to labor," but he merely replied that he was an "unprofitable servant."

And as they pleaded with him to offer the same prayer as Christ our Blessed Lord: "My God, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me," he merely murmured: "Your will, O Lord, be done, not mine."

His last words were: "It is growing late, the day is already far spent." No doubt he perceived their symbolic significance. Then he added: "My God, come to me or command that I go to Thee: draw me from this valley of tears and I shall run to the odor of Thy ointments." He rushed towards Eternity in an outburst of love. Already he was soaring above and beyond life like those birds whose wings beat the ground before leaving it.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIRACLE OF DAILY LIFE

WHEN Maurice Barrès visited the fields and streams among which Joan of Arc had spent her childhood, he was suddenly struck by the thought: "Genius, in due time, becomes foreign to the soil that bore it, and must rise to Heaven like a migrating bird."

This observation applies equally to St Francis de Sales, yet so much a part of Savoy does he seem that many authors have attempted to keep him firmly rooted in the soil of that district, to bury him, so to speak, with garlands of the flowers that he loved, as the shrines on Palm Sunday are buried beneath the heaps of palms. One ought to be careful not to do so, however.

There is, after all, some excuse for the many critics and biographers who have so grossly misrepresented the character and personality of our Saint. There is nothing basically striking about his genius, nor are the fundamental reasons for his uniqueness apparent at first sight. He was charged with no special mission; he was neither a prophet nor a hermit; there was nothing forbidding or out-of-the-way about his life. Outwardly there was little to distinguish him from his neighbors. "He kept in the common way . . ." testified Madame de Chantal in the

investigation preceding his canonization, a document we must never weary of quoting for in it she gives the key to his ardent heart. One is almost tempted to dismiss him as an undistinguished individual, sweet, good-natured, honest, unobtrusive, but not possessed of virtues uncommon in the ordinary run of men. But what a different conception of him one gets if one tries, even briefly, to imitate him! One is suddenly overwhelmed with the realization of what a truly saintly life he led.

In his preface to the complete edition of the Saint's works published by the Visitation of Annecy, Dom Mackey makes this observation about St Francis de Sales: "To attain to heroic sanctity, one need only make full use of the opportunities that present themselves in the course of our daily lives. As a matter of fact, God had endowed him with extraordinary natural talents; but, the Saint employed only very ordinary means to develop them. His life flowed along as peacefully as a quiet river, his saintliness manifesting itself through natural channels and under circumstances in no way out of the ordinary; he did only what anyone else might have done under similar conditions. There was no ideal perfection in the institutions which had formed his character. In his family life at home and during his sojourns in Paris and Padua he encountered numerous temptations which, had he succumbed to them as many about him did, would have brought about his downfall. But, too, without waiting for any formal revelation or for a path to be marked out for him, he found, used, and assimilated enough good to perfect his character."

This is not very aptly phrased, but on the whole the point is well taken. If his life did not actually flow along as peacefully as a quiet river — for he underwent the perils of religious persecution in Chablais and all the annoyances consequent to administering a diocese on the frontier, at the very gates of heresy — at least it appeared calm and dignified because he had such splendid command of his emotions and passions. He made the most of ordinary happenings, but when he was confronted with extraordinary ones, he handled them with so much ease that they appeared ordinary. So well did he prepare himself for the life he was to live that, to use a military comparison, war was but a continuation of the military games of the training school. He faced prosperity and adversity with the same well-poised, gentle equanimity. The beauty of his interior life radiated from him with compelling sweetness.

"He kept in the common way," as Madame de Chantal said; only she added: "but in a manner so divine and heavenly that nothing else in his life was so admirable." And in those few words Madame de Chantal has completely summed up the saintliness of Francis de Sales. Never in his life did he perform a miracle, but his whole life was one continuous miracle because he allowed no moment of it to escape without offering it to God. In the light of eternity he weighed the importance of every heart-beat, of every second of the rapidly departing years, and he desired that each of them should bear ever greater homage from the created to the Creator Who distributes time and life.

Michelangelo, disillusioned and sighing for release from life, confided to Vasari: "There is no depth in my being that has not been hollowed out by the chisel of death," adding that he desired to "rest his tired bones beside his fathers in peace."

Both of the biographers of St Francis de Sales, M. Fortunat Strowski and the Abbé Francis Vincent, have come to the conclusion that the glowing ardor of the Saint cooled with age. They assure us that he became morose and gloomy. They think him disillusioned. . . Ah! that, no. I defy anyone to discover a disillusioned St Francis de Sales in his correspondence, which is an exact reflection of his vivid personality. Toward the end of his life, when he had taken upon his shoulders ever more burdensome responsibilities, his health ruined, and still endeavoring to answer every letter he received, to see every visitor who sought him out, one is conscious how overworked he was, quite a different matter from being disillusioned. And even the fact that he was called upon to do an impossible number of things is not evident from any complaint or querulousness on his part, it is only that his notes are shorter, couched in quicker, more staccato phrases. As a matter of fact, he died from sheer overwork, sound of body and in the full possession of his faculties. Instead of becoming disillusioned, he became more and more detached with the years, more calm, more serene. Unlike Michelangelo he was not preoccupied with death, but with life hereafter with God. To M. de Bellegarde who was on the verge of death, he wrote:

"Keep your eyes fixed on that blessed eternity towards which we are hastening with the speedy flight of these flying years. In these moments, however, as in a little pit, are enclosed the seeds of all eternity."

That sentence, so fraught with meaning, is well worth pondering. Eternity is in each moment of our lives. Every second we live belongs to God, and may be used in His service. Madame de Chantal comments as follows upon this thought, which in sheer depth might have inspired a Pascal or a Bossuet:

"He was so imperturbable, so calm; the light of God shone so bright in that blessed soul, purer than the sunlight, and whiter than snow, that he was conscious of every movement he made, however slight or trifling." He squeezed his life to get the most out of it as one squeezes an orange to get the last drop of the juice. And Madame de Chantal continues:

"He used to cry out: 'Ah ! May my heart be plucked out if ever I fail to devote it to love ! May I either love or die, for life without love is worse than death for me. May I be dead to all other loves that I may live only to love Jesus !' " In this way everything in his life became a sacrifice upon the altar of love. By exercising the most painstaking care, he gained control over every phase and every moment of his life that he might offer it all to God. The love of God burned bright within him. Everything — work, fatigue, even death — becomes love when it is endured for love.

Among his letters one finds references to captains who

had no time to die on the field of battle because they were too busy fighting. His life was similar. A life thus consumed is dead to death itself. Death bursts forth like a final flame with no ashes remaining.

BOOK II

ST FRANCIS DE SALES AND LOVE IN MARRIAGE

CHAPTER I

LIFE IS LOVE

ALTHOUGH I will discuss those aspects of St Francis de Sales' character upon which his activities as a spiritual director throw light from an entirely secular point of view, and although I will doubtless at times bring a smile to the reader's face, so invariable was the Saint's courtesy, so charming his relations with his parishioners, I trust nevertheless that the reader will have ever before his eyes that face, so infinitely gentle yet so majestic, so peaceful yet so forceful, a face so sweet and radiant that it poured peace as a balm into all wounded hearts. To get a true picture of him one should read and reread the testimony of Madame de Chantal at the inquiry preceding his beatification. She shows how truly he loved his neighbor, putting himself at the beck and call of even the most insignificant of people; how he put up with the most aggravating of inanities with never a show of impatience, and never refused alms to anyone. He once even took off his shoes and gave them away, and on another occasion in the

midst of winter did the same with his woollen vest. Tenderly and with infinite pity he would assist even debauched women who would fall again and again into sin. There was no limit to his endurance; Bishop Camus used to say of him that his shoulders were broad enough to bear the burdens of the entire world. He was serene in the face of threats, indifferent as he said, "to calm or to storm"; so temperate and abstemious he would eat only what the poor might have; he cheerfully suffered every imaginable physical discomfort, yet as he never complained it was only late in life that anyone noticed it.

"Therefore," explains Madame de Chantal, "he was careful to lead an ordinary life, devoid of those qualities the world esteems so highly. All the beauty of his soul was within, comprised in the perfection of those virtues that God had divinely arranged; there was no outward sign of them except the perfection with which he accomplished the most commonplace deeds, and they he performed in the most marvellous fashion." An absolutely stainless purity characterized his life but "he was often tried," declares Madame de Chantal, "and very severely, too, by different persons." Yet he himself said "that it never occurred to him to notice beauty or ugliness of form or feature in those whom he met; and that when they had left his presence, he could not recall what they looked like."

Discreet in his human relationships, he was careful to leave the door open when he was entertaining visitors, always insisting upon having one of his chaplains or his

valet within sight. Thus he avoided having to refute calumnies about himself as St Jerome, as discreet as he, was obliged to do. Or perhaps better, he refused to do so, so clear was his conscious, even when, as once happened, his petty sovereign of Savoy sponsored an ignoble scheme to besmirch his name. A humility, deep and sincere, attracted those whom the dignity of the Saint might have repelled. He knew how to speak to kings and of kings (read his letter on the death of Henry IV), as well as to the most insignificant of men. Ambition was utterly foreign to him; he set no value upon honors or the Court. He preached with equal fervor to small audiences and to large.

His love for the poor was so sincere that, on one occasion, when he was visiting an old man whose sickness was most repulsive, he was warned by the sick man's daughter, "Monseigneur, I fear that you will find the odor very distressing." His only reply, "For me it will have the fragrance of a rose."

The patience of St Francis de Sales was boundless; cheerfully and pleasantly he endured all the trials occasioned by his fellow-men, as well as sickness and death. His calmness, states Monseigneur de Berulle, was "imperturbable." It was the result of his bending his will to the divine will which rendered him indifferent to life or death.

He penetrated the depths of souls as easily as if they were made of crystal, the most reticent revealing their inmost thoughts to him. This ability to read and understand hearts attracted so many to him that his life was

almost an hourly martyrdom to the cause of spiritual direction, but he welcomed every confidence as he answered every letter. In other respects he seemed quite undistinguished, for one does not attract the eyes of the crowd by being imperturbable, hospitable, patient, generous, temperate, abstemious, chaste, discreet, charitable, and clear-sighted.

All of these virtues, however, he practised every day to a supernatural degree. We have seen that he made a miracle of his daily life by dedicating every second of it to the service of God. At the Consecration of the Host at Mass, his face was radiant, as if he were transfigured.

"I had such veneration for him," related Ste Chantal, "that when I received his letters I opened them and read them on my knees. I kissed them out of reverence and devotion, and I received all he said as emanating from the Spirit of God." For "God had diffused in the centre of that holy being, or as he expressed it, at the very peak of his soul, a light so clear that he saw in their entirety the truths of faith and their excellence. This produced in him ardent outbursts of love, ecstacies, and delights. He submitted his whole being completely to these truths which were presented to him by his strong will which was totally subjected to the sublime will of God. The place where he received this illumination he called the sanctuary of God wherein his soul dwelt alone with God. This was his retreat, his most habitual sojourn, for in spite of his continual exterior occupations he kept his mind in that interior solitude as much as possible."

There he dwelt with God. Search his life; weigh his

thoughts; sound the depths of his heart; you will find one love, single, alone. "These half-dead hearts of ours, what good are they ?" he once wrote of those who did not know what love is. For him life should be only love. With him it was an overpowering passion for God.

Divine love is the key to his teaching as well as to his life. The spiritual advice of St Francis de Sales has not lost its validity with the passing of time. There is nothing passing or ephemeral about the soul; it is ridiculous to believe that it undergoes evolution. Like death, it is changeless. Every disorder of mind or body, including such supposedly modern ailments as nervousness and neurasthenia, has existed in all ages, and each has been diagnosed by ancient psychologists, and especially by the Fathers of the Church. Alfred Capus, one of the most penetrating commentators upon present-day manners and customs, wrote in a newspaper dispatch from Paris: "As one crosses the Place de l'Opéra, it is difficult to reconstruct an accurate mental picture of the city as it was under Philip Augustus, with its embattled walls, its towers, its spires, and its gabled roofs, but how easy it is to picture the Frenchwoman who made that city her home ! Her surroundings were utterly different from ours, but she experienced the same needs, was stirred by the same passions, was actuated by the same caprices and bound by the same duties. The household dramas of love and life were similar then as now. . ."

We need not fear, therefore, that the teachings of St

Francis de Sales will seem out-of-date. He and Montaigne were the forerunners of that long line of writers who set themselves the task of analyzing and describing the manners and customs of France, writers to whom the very essence of French literature is due, who achieved that balanced combination of objectiveness, shrewd choice of significant detail, a smooth and polished style, and, above all, sound psychology. He is the precursor of La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld; by his profound understanding and analysis of the human heart, he even paves the way for the psychological subtleties of Madame de la Fayette and for that greatest of the poets of love, Jean Racine. Our more modern novelists — that neo-psychological school which recognizes as its masters Marcel Proust and André Gidé in the realm of literature, and Doctor Freud, whose doctrines are so often badly interpreted and almost invariably exaggerated, in the psychical domain, and his more recent disciples, M. Jacques de Lacretelle, or M. Jacques Rivière, who seek to "reduce life to its most delicate perceptions and reactions," — all of these can well afford to study St Francis de Sales.

But, he would lead them further, perhaps, than they care to go. For his insight into life springs from different motives than theirs, and is directed towards a different goal. It was his aim by probing one's own inner being, and seeking out those "delicate perceptions and reactions," to develop one's character in a rational, balanced fashion, yet without sacrificing one's spontaneity; to gain complete control over oneself by gradually mastering one's weakness, yet aiming at such perfect co-

ordination that no phase of one's personality need be held in check. He warns us against that lack of restraint that ends in the gradual disintegration of character and transforms society into a confused and disordered group of beings each blindly following the other like fugitive shadows on the stage of life, until they are no longer able to recognize themselves.

St Francis de Sales, in fact, distinguishes between the two aspects of our being. In the lower realm struggles that quivering mass of sensations, appetites, and affections for human beings which do not rise above this passing life. Most sociologists and writers of fiction have confined their attention to the exploration of this domain. They are acquainted only with that part of us which, while it belongs to us, is not really us at all. But there is in us another realm into which one may not enter without faith. It is an oasis, a fortress, the centre of our true self and its sanctuary. "Our reason, or to be more exact, our soul, in as much as it is gifted with reason, is the real temple of the great God, Who dwells in it in a special manner. 'I sought Thee,' St Augustine admitted, 'outside of myself and I did not find Thee because Thou wert within me.'"

It is to this higher self, to this tabernacle within us, that St Francis de Sales desires to attract us, whether, like the Philothea of the "Introduction to the Devout Life," we remain in the world, or whether we retire from the world like the Théotime of the "Treatise on the Love of God." We cannot achieve this end by sheer will power; we must also be prompted by love.

CHAPTER II

PRELUDE TO THE "INTRODUCTION TO A DEVOUT LIFE"

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES is pre-eminent in his analysis of the complexion and psychology of love. One of his major preoccupations was to reintroduce it into life through the medium of marriage, in which, although the statement may seem utterly banal, the very meaning of the word love is not generally known.

Love was reborn and entirely transformed with the coming of Christianity. Search through pagan society as one may, one will discover only desire and voluptuousness — with their consequent joy, satiety, disillusionment, and even cruelty — but love, with its haunting desire for permanence and for the complete fusion of two beings is conspicuously absent. Plato, alone, intuitively sensed it in "Phædo" and in the "First Alcibiades," and to ephemeral beauty contrasted the immortal soul. He who loves only beauty of body, Plato explains, does not love truly, and that is why love flees when youth fades. As Socrates remarked to Alcibiades, "your external beauty is beginning to fade, whereas your own true beauty is just budding."

The better to stamp this perishable flesh with a divine imprint, Christianity made of marriage a sacrament.

Never have women fully appreciated what they owe to Christianity. Christianity invested woman with a grace and dignity without which she might be an object of pleasure or of passion but never of love. Through it she became the motive force behind chivalry. Even in unlawful love, witness Bajazet or Phædo, Christianity unceasingly injected scruples, delicacy, remorse, all those tendencies towards sacrifice which are like a company of arch-angels guarding the abyss where passion flourishes.

The religious institution of marriage was held in high esteem during the Middle Ages, and with it the hierarchy it introducted into family life, that mirror of the complete social body. It provided an indissoluble bond which solidified human affections. But this institution was menaced with a two-fold attack. It received its first blow in those rudely primitive days when feudal barons considered the alliances of their sons and daughters as an essential link in the consolidation of their houses. They attached no importance to all the attractions and aversions which make human intercourse a joy or an agony. Parents abused their parental authority; woman was sacrificed on the altar of family ambition. Her sacrifice was not without its nobility, but it was not always accepted with resignation; bitterness, revenge, retaliation often followed in its wake. It was noble in that it gave the individual woman a sense of her power and of her importance in the future of the family. But too often under these conditions marriage, which should be the soul of order, provoked dissatisfaction, hostility, dis-

loyalty, and other such qualities conducive to disorder and so likely to disrupt the home. The irritating echo of this deplorable condition of affairs is heard in the literature of every century beginning with the thirteenth.

Following the heroic "Chansons de Gestes" which sing the praises of Bertha de Roussillon accompanying her husband into poverty and exile; the "Chanson d'Aspremont," in which Ameline brings back to God her cruel husband, Gérard de Freite; and a nobler example still, the admirable Guibord who forces her gallant husband, William of Orange, to return to battle when he is exhausted and covered with wounds — after all these glorious epics came novels of adventure, tales of Arthur and the Round Table. All of these romantic writings are colored with fatality, and undertake, not to analyze, which is in the province of art, but to excuse unlawful love.

Lady de Faiel allows herself to be seduced by Castellan de Couci for they had listened together with ear or heart to the "sweet voice of the wild nightingale." The beautiful Flamenca finds a way to communicate with William de Nevers under the very nose of the grouchiest and most jealous of husbands, Archambaut de Bourbon. According as the mood of the authors is gay or gloomy, according as they lean towards pleasure or passion, they cherish the sorrowful, inordinate dream of Tristan de Léonois or else they pave the way for the fantasies and frivolities of Ariosto and Boccaccio. Doubtless literature does not always faithfully reflect the manners and customs of an age; it is rare, however, that it does not echo the unrest of an entire civilization.

The Renaissance, with the wealth of desires it created and its promise of a more varied and elegant life, increased this unrest. Paternal authority, if it was not entirely denied, was weakened. It was defended, it is true, by those sufficiently level-headed not to be corrupted by the new outlook on life. Montaigne thought to dignify and beautify this authority with grace and gentleness, but Rabelais wished to see it maintained exactly as it had been.

Both Rabelais and Montaigne referred to parental authority in glowing terms — as, for instance, in the lesson Gargantua gives his son, and Book II of the "Essays." But neither of them paid the slightest attention to love in marriage. Gargantua will not admit that children should have a voice in the choice of husband or wife; that is the parents' affair. Parents are experienced and alone capable of acquitting themselves of this obligation. How scandalous it is for these lovers, these Romeos and Juliettes, even to think that they can dispense with the consent of their fathers and mothers! "And these doleful parents see," he continues, "their beautiful daughters carried off by an unknown stranger, cruel, barbarous . . . their handsome girls, refined, rich, healthy, whom they have brought up so carefully. How, think you, they look upon it?" And it is, indeed, a terrible domestic tragedy. But, there is the case, too, of the young girl married against her will to some repugnant dotard simply because it pleased her family or suited their needs. Gargantua commands Pantagruel: "I shall make arrangements for your marriage." As Rabelais saw it, happiness or un-

happiness in marriage is largely a matter of chance: "It is altogether fitting," he states, "to enter marriage at random, eyes bound, head lowered, kissing the ground in humility and leaving the rest to God."

Montaigne, on his side, looked upon marriage as a socially expedient institution conducive to human peace. He warns a young man about to be married — whom he has already urged not to marry too young — not to seek a wife with a large dowry. "There is no debt," he argues, "that brings more ruin into houses than that," doubtless because too large a dowry will upset a man's habits and requires too much attention. But, he immediately adds, "Those who dissuade us from marrying rich wives, lest they may prove over disdainful and peevish, or less tractable and loving, are mistaken in advising us to forego a real commodity for so frivolous a conjecture. To an unreasonable woman, it is all the same whether she gives one reason for an act or another. They love to be where they are most wronged. Injustice doth allure them as the honor of their virtuous actions enticeth the good. And the richer they are, the more mild and gentle are they; as more willingly and gloriously chaste, by how much fairer they are." According to Montaigne, a good marriage, "if such is possible," must keep love firmly without. It is merely a peaceful companionship between two people who are agreeable and helpful to each other. He compares it to life in a cage where "The birds that are outside despair of ever entering, while those within are clamoring for their freedom." Socrates, debating whether it was more satisfactory, to

take a wife or not, concluded: "Whichever alternative you choose, you will surely repent of it."

Rabelais and Montaigne both favored conventional marriages in which the opinions of the children were not consulted, and from which neither happiness nor intimate joy should be expected but only the security and solid establishment of a family. They constructed for marriage a dwelling midway on a hill, sheltered from winds but from sunlight as well. Such marriage is a social institution; it is not a sacrament. Bereft of God's blessing, it is left to itself and to the wisdom of man. And if the couple are not happy together, that trifling disadvantage that frightened Panurge, then they must reconcile themselves to it, for better or worse. Which is essentially the materialistic philosophy of Molière.

Although they both depreciated marriage, at least they did not attempt to break down the family. The disintegration of the family sprang from the Reformation. Luther, as M. Jacques Maritain, has ably demonstrated, inaugurated the enthronement of the ego. By its interpretation of the principle of free will, the Reformation opened the door to individualism. It denied the indissolubility of the sacramental bond of marriage. Marriage was no longer considered different from any other human bond. It was no longer a union of souls.

Such was the state of marriage when St Francis de Sales began to teach. In traditional society, woman was — Rabelais and Montaigne feared the reformers — too often sacrificed to the family, and a new doctrine which threatened to demolish the unity of the home was being

broadcast. Parents were imposing marriage based on utilitarian reasons upon their offspring without consulting the desires of the latter, thus preparing the way for conjugal disorders. Numerous evils proceeded from this system. When life-partners were selected for the young by their parents, these youthful victims found it easy to rebel against all authority. Individual strength and wilful waywardness disregarded eternal promises, substituted the possibility of divorce for the principle of an indissoluble union, and made human flesh a prey to every weakness in separating it from the love of the spirit which revivifies.

CHAPTER III

THE "INTRODUCTION TO A DEVOUT LIFE"

THE "Introduction to a Devout Life" is not a treatise on conjugal love, but a collection of letters of spiritual counsel, slightly retouched. The anonymous biographer previously quoted in discussing their origin, hints that, despite all evidence to the contrary, they were written at the suggestion of Henri IV.

"Francis de Sales was at that time the spiritual advisor of a lady whose state in life made it necessary for her to frequent fashionable circles, but who none the less desired fervently to lead a truly Christian life. The Saint, knowing that her good example would leave its impress on the lives of those around her, wrote detailed instructions to her on how to strive after Christian perfection and yet not abandon her social obligations. These counsels were specific and exact, covering every possible event that might arise. The lady, who profited greatly by them, showed them to her confessor, a Jesuit. It is said that upon reading them he was struck by the fact that they would be very helpful to laymen who find it so easy to convince themselves that they cannot serve God, either at Court or under the pressure of business affairs. With this in mind, he begged St Francis de Sales to collect

and retouch the various letters he had written this lady. This he did, and the result was the "Book of Philothea" or the "Introduction to a Devout Life," as we know it today.

"Whatever truth there may be in this statement, it is certain that an actual conversation between Henry IV and Des Hayes contributed most toward the publication of this book. This prince had a very high opinion of Francis de Sales who, he was convinced, possessed an extraordinary ability to inspire virtue in anyone. He instructed Des Hayes to write to the Saint, advising him that to publish a book informing laymen of true and substantial piety would be a task eminently worthy of him."

This theory that Henri IV suggested that the book be written has never been sustained. Charles Augustus de Sales, nephew of the Saint and his biographer, does not speak of it, but he does give the name of the lady whose spiritual guidance was to prove so profitable to countless souls — Louise du Châtel, wife of Seigneur de Charmoisy. Other historians, Dom Mackey especially, deny that she played any part in the composition of the book, discrediting this well-substantiated tradition. They look upon the "Introduction" as a systematically written treatise. Not only is there no convincing evidence to support such a theory, but it runs counter to all that we know of St Francis de Sales' methods of composition. Madame de Charmoisy, in fact, was careful to preserve the letters she had received from him, and turned them over to Father Fourrier; these letters, with a number of others

similar in nature, comprised the first edition of the "Introduction." It is possible that, from that time on, the Bishop of Geneva directed his penitents by means of a systematically arranged treatise, which may have served as a first draught of his later work. This opinion is accepted by the Order of the Visitation.

The book appeared early in 1609. A letter from St Francis de Sales to Madame de Chantal dated February 1609, fixes this fact definitely, for in it he says that he is sending her two copies of his book. Surely he would not have delayed sending it to her whom he so highly esteemed. The book was an immediate success. The booksellers had great difficulty keeping it in stock, so great was the demand for it. The first convent of the Order of the Visitation, that at Annecy, has in its possession a copy of the first edition, printed *in Lyons by Pierre Rigaud on the Rue Murière at the corner of the Rue Ferraudière at the sign of the clock*. Another edition had to be printed at once, but not before there had been time to make additions, corrections, and various other improvements.

A work of this sort was much needed. The "Imitation of Christ," published two centuries before, was written for lovers of solitude and silence. Although it may profitably be read by persons of every walk in life because of its deep analysis of the workings of divine grace in the human soul, and because of the spirit of detachment from earthly vanities that it inculcates, yet it is more suitable for monks than laymen. St Francis de Sales, on the other hand, summing up the doctrine of St Thomas

Aquinas, clearly demonstrated that the perfection of a Christian life may be attained by those who have not foresworn the world quite as well as by those who have entered a religious order.

This practical little treatise on daily life, so charming with its familiar illustrations, its good grace and delightful humor which skilfully conceal the harsh and repellant side of mortification, contains a scheme of conduct for women in every condition of life, for young girls, married women, and widows. Each may consider it as having been written for her individually. Yet it carries a message for all. The flower-girl, Glycera, made many bouquets with the same flowers. So too, circumstances may differ but woman remains unchanged.

Men, also, may profit by the "Introduction." From it they will glean much worldly wisdom, many significant lessons on the vanity of honors, on the honorable burdens of marriage and the manner of conducting business transactions without haste or worry.

A diligent perusal of this volume will bring home the amazing truth that, far from impoverishing life, limiting or restricting it, St Francis de Sales has broadened and enriched it. He advises one to maintain patient watchfulness over one's heart that its affections may not be squandered. He warns those of noble birth not to be led astray by trivial preoccupation with such unessentials as rank, honors, and titles, which should occupy only idle minds. Those who are engaged in public offices, however, should command the respect of their fellowmen by their dignity and by manifesting "prudence

and discretion, which, however, should be accompanied by charity and courtesy." Fill life to the brim, he advises, but empty it of all pettiness and evil-doing.

What a pity that this great Saint was not the spiritual guide of some ambitious man, eager to play a leading part on life's stage ! The hard-pressed business man, engrossed with a thousand cares, would have received, no doubt, a marvellous treatise from his pen. The nature of it we may easily guess from a letter he wrote the young Baron de Chantal, about to set out for Court. The letter itself is a rule of conduct. "Ambition," it states, "covets honors before it merits them." He implores this young man, about to set sail on the high seas of the world, not to let himself become entangled in petty love-affairs, to avoid gambling which, little by little, dissipates the mind and blights every good intention, not to soften his body by being over solicitous about food, sleep, and similar indulgences, because a sturdy, generous heart always scorns affectation and corporal delights. He then describes the type of courtier who would appeal to St Louis, at that time King of France: "honorable, fearless, generous, civil, frank, polite, gracious, courteous, but yet a good Christian."

There is much in the "Introduction" that applies to men as well as to women. But it was to the latter that this admirable treatise was primarily directed.

To become thoroughly acquainted with the counsels of this gentle Saint, one should read the ten volumes of his correspondence, as well as the "Introduction"; one ought even to know the details of his ecclesiastical life. For

never did St Francis de Sales leave the solid footing of every-day realities. His conclusions are based upon facts which are irrefutable. But from these unimposing facts what vast structures does he not build up ? His teaching is a Jacob's ladder, rising from the lowly earth to the throne of the living God, but because the rungs may be approached with such ease, the rigor of the ascent is not perceived.

CHAPTER IV

THE YOUNG GIRL

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES' views on marriage may be summed up in a few words. It should be entered into without constraint and for all time, and, contradictory though it may seem, it should be based on love.

First of all, he advises a young girl to preserve her heart intact, not to distribute it piecemeal among those about her.

One of the first sermons he delivered after his elevation to the episcopacy was to denounce and forbid a custom then quite popular in Annecy, and practised throughout France, and even in England and Scotland. This was the dangerous game of Valentines. On the fourteenth of February, St Valentine's Day, the young men and girls of the city gathered around two ballot boxes. The name of each young person was inscribed on slips of paper which were then dropped in separate boxes, one for boys and one for girls. Next, the papers were withdrawn; first, a girl's name, then, a young man's. The couple thus designated were supposed to contract a friendly alliance for the coming year.

"During all that time," says a biographer of St Francis de Sales, "the young man wore over his heart or on

his sleeve the name of his Valentine; he pledged himself to pay homage to her on all occasions, to escort her to balls, parties, and various gatherings, and added to all these gallantries different gifts." Husbands and wives claimed their share of this custom which caused jealousies and familiarities, the more so because not infrequently subterfuges were resorted to to favor their natural inclinations. One is tempted to think of this as quite a charming custom. The Bishop felt differently about it, however, and abolished it. Instead of the former ballots, he substituted pieces of paper on which were written the names of saints with the understanding that the saint whose name was drawn should be honored in some special way. The young folks grumbled and attempted to resist the reform. St Francis de Sales held firm and triumphed.

This is a very simple illustration of the Saint's method of correcting evil habits. He was convinced that occasions for losing both heart and head are frequent enough without going out of one's way to seek them, and that no prudence is too great when it is a matter of safeguarding young girls, and preserving them from all familiarities. He was vigorously opposed to the weak foppishness of the old order, the flagrant flirting of yesterday, and the comradery of today. He advises a young girl not to allow herself to be touched uncivilly, either playfully or otherwise. For he thought that a girl should keep her heart uncommitted and her thoughts pure as a preparation for marriage. She should restrain her imagination

which is prone "to esteem as more desirable that which she does not know."

"O Virgins," he exclaims with a truly paternal tenderness, "if you are planning on temporal marriage, jealously preserve your first love for your husband. It is a great mistake, I think, to offer, instead of a whole and unpledged heart, one that is sophisticated, broken, and bruised from trafficking in love."

He knew full well of what well nigh paramount importance is one's first love, and realized that the determination to have but one love is a bulwark of defence against infidelity. He knew, too, that the imagination, once stirred, becomes attached to these sentimental experiences, and that they soon become a habit, leading the victim on towards ever more unsubstantial mirages.

Youth should be gay and cheerful, he felt, yet these qualities are much more easily attained when the heart is preserved intact. In the beginning of the "Introduction," he reminds us that devout people are often represented as gloomy, uncomfortable, and sad. They should be just the opposite, or else they are not truly devout, for true devoutness is nothing but a constant, ardent application of religious faith to every-day occurrences, and cannot fail to leave one imbued with a deep interior peace and happiness.

St Francis de Sales is delightfully indulgent to the coquetry of young girls. In his chapter on propriety in dress, he does not advise a girl to forego the pleasure of wearing little furbelows and baubles, "because she may

lawfully desire to attract many men, although it should be for the sole purpose of gaining one of them in a holy marriage." Does he not restrain the zeal of Madame de Chantal who maintained a somewhat too austere check on the dress of her daughter ? "What are you doing ?" he chided her kindly. "Girls must make themselves somewhat attractive."

And in 1615, when young Françoise de Rabutin was heartbroken at her mother's absence, "because she did not have any money to buy finery for herself," the Bishop took it upon himself to authorize her to make whatever purchases she wished. "I told her," he explained to her mother, Madame de Chantal, "that she should get a pretty collar for the village festival, and that you, on your return, would buy her a still prettier one. She seems to take great pleasure in her laces and high collars (you see I do know something about these things), so let her have them; when she learns that they do not make so much difference after all, she will be herself again." But how gently he could repress any boldness on the part of this young lady ! One day, when she appeared a little too décolleté, he maliciously stuck pins in her.

Although he forbade games of chance as intemperate and dangerous he insisted that especially the young should have their recreations. Quoting Cassian, he recalls the response of St John the Evangelist whom a hunter in amazement found caressing a partridge.

"How can a man of your exalted dignity lend himself to so weak and sickly an occupation ?"

"Why," replied the Saint, "do you not always carry your bow bent ?"

"Because," rejoined the hunter, "if it were subjected continuously to that strain, it might fail to accomplish its purpose in the hour of need."

"Do not be astonished then, if I sometimes divert my mind with pleasing trifles. I can better apply myself to serious duties afterwards."

And St Francis de Sales adds: "To be so rigorous, harsh, and austere as not to permit recreation for oneself or for others is unquestionably a vice."

Physical exercise, sports — (in his day, racing, fencing, etc., today, golf, tennis, etc.) all of them he declares are good and lawful, adding, however: "We should guard against excess in their pursuit, both in the time devoted to them and the money expended on them." Sane and splendid advice, indeed, were it for no other reason than to convince us that the silliest people in the world and the most tiresome to meet are these rabid tennis champions who have no other interests in life but their matches. Life is too short to bungle it thus. A pastime is not a profession. Sports are justifiable and valuable in so far as they conduce to bodily health and afford a means of mental relaxation. They are not a sufficient end in themselves, particularly once a certain age has been reached — but what is that age ? Nothing could be more absurd than to devote one's whole life to sports.

While it is permissible to play, to dance, to bet, to enjoy unoffending comedies, to dine well, one should not give oneself over to such pursuits. We should remain de-

tached. For these are "vain and foolish affections" like the giddy joy of children chasing butterflies. St Francis de Sales compares balls and dancing parties to mushrooms, the best of which are no good. Our modern lovers of cryptograms, it is true, assure us that almost all are edible, and some most succulent.

The permission, however, granted to Philothea by the Bishop of Geneva with so much decorum, tact and reserve, for a restrained and moderate use of the pleasures of the world, was at that time looked upon with grave misgivings by many contemporary preachers, already ripe for the doctrines of Jansenius. A priest of this type, having denounced from the pulpit as pernicious the "Introduction to a Devout Life," drew a copy of it from his sleeve, and after a lighted candle had been brought with great ceremony, he burned the book publicly as a scandalous work, deserving of oblivion.

When his friends indignantly reported this to St Francis de Sales, he displayed no emotion. Neither criticism nor calumny ruffled his peace of mind. Refusing to reply to this attack, he allowed time and truth to confound his adversaries without his intervention. He excused the excited preacher and benevolently explained that to be insensible to insults, it is absolutely necessary to desire no reputation. A good Christian is not disturbed by the judgments of men.

THE dispute as to whether or not it was permissible to attend balls caused a great furore in his day. Dancing, St Francis de Sales had frequently warned, "attracts vice

and sin, stirs up quarrels and envies. As pleasure reigns supreme at these gatherings, if anyone wishes to whisper wheedling, indecent words into a young girl's ear or to cast lustful glances upon her, it is easy for her heart to imbibe the poison." Philothea was, therefore, put on her guard. "These recreations are dangerous; they dissipate the spirit of devotion, weaken spiritual resolves and cool the ardor of charity, while they awaken in the soul a thousand varieties of evil impulses." He then recalled the example of Ste Elizabeth of Hungary who had danced at balls and parties without injuring her devotion in the least.

But even these qualifications did not seem strong enough, and several biographers view with alarm his audacity in appearing to countenance dancing. Such, indeed, is the attitude of the anonymous biographer who received his inspiration from the lives of the Saint published in Italy. He even implies that this fault of the Bishop of Geneva may be attributed to his exceeding naïveté:

"Francis de Sales," he assures us, "did not tolerate dancing as it now prevails (he wrote in 1689) with the multitude of sins it occasions; on the whole, most dances today are full of vanity, luxury, and concupiscence. Like pleasure, dancing is pursued with lust in view, since all are persuaded that every barrier of reserve can be dropped. Vice seems to be less forbidden on these occasions, and the large number of ill-assorted people who are assembled gives rise to a confusion that favors evil designs. In fine, experience teaches us that dancing is the most pernicious

diversion of Christianity because it blights every sentiment of virtue, paralyzes all attractions to the things of the spirit, leaving only a dissipated mind with a craving for divers pleasures."

This biographer goes on to say: "It never occurred to St Francis de Sales to permit dancing as we understand it today or as it has just been described. But he did sanction dancing when reputable people took advantage of their being gathered together to enjoy this form of recreation. Even when they set a day for this diversion, he supposed that those who gave the ball were prudent and discreet, that the guests invited were respectable and modest, displaying no extravagance or extremes in apparel and attempting none of those disorderly, cajoling, indecent manners that are affected with evil intent. A ball conducted with such propriety is very rare today, and no one would care to attend it if so many precautions were taken."

That is quite likely, and St Francis de Sales would have smiled at that final reflection. But he did not require so many precautions, for he thoroughly understood that worldly pleasures should neither be minimized nor exaggerated. Judging by the long, sad, and even wretchedly discomfited faces of our modern dancers of tangos and fox-trots, one does not get the impression that they are indulging in any such systematic and brazen dissoluteness. The world has its apaches, but it also had its towers of defence. On the whole, the virtue of women is found as easily after a ball as furs and overcoats are found in the cloakroom, for usually virtue that may be thus

easily impaired is like a string of pearls that may be misplaced with no great loss because the pearls were only imitation in the first place. The chief danger in these gatherings is the failure of the hostess to be discriminating in the choice of her guests. Our old author was correct when he wrote: "The large number of ill-assorted people who are assembled gives rise to a confusion that favors evil designs." Barriers have been let down, and such indiscriminate assemblages are gathered — often people are not even introduced — that some young girls dance a whole winter through with the two or three young men whom they take with them, somewhat as if they were horses in a racing stable.

But does not dancing provide a pleasure all its own, the delight of giving a visible, living form to rhythm, the joy of seeing a supple harmony which, like a scarf, rises and falls unceasingly ? Mr Paul Valery's Socrates in his charming dialogue "The Soul and Dancing" says in regard to the dancer Rhodonia: "In some marvellous manner one seems to hear the rhythm of her dance." And further on: "Look at her ! Slender, absorbed in pure precision of movement, she is the exact embodiment of perfect harmony. . . She bends and sways, but she comes back so precisely to the beat that if I close my eyes I see her perfectly by means of my hearing. I follow her, never losing sight of one graceful motion; and if my ears were stuffed while I looked at her it would be impossible for me not to hear the instruments so perfectly does she embody rhythm and music." There is, therefore, in dancing more spiritual mystery than preach-

ers imagine, and youthful limbs often take on the illusion of wings.

Jacqueline Favre, daughter of the celebrated President, was intensely fond of dancing and did it very well. One evening at a ball in Chambéry, a circle of her friends closed in around her to admire her dancing. In the midst of her dainty steps she was surprised at this attention. She was a pious young girl, and divine grace abruptly inspired her.

"Poor little girl !" she murmured to herself during an intermission while her friends thought her elated and exultant over her recent triumph, "What will you gain from all these intricate steps that you execute so perfectly ? People will say: 'That young lady dances marvellously.' That will be all ! What a sorry recompense !"

Then and there she resolved to enter the cloister where she would find, instead of applause and acclaim, solitude and peace. St Francis de Sales was the confidant of that vocation.

Now his brother Louis was very much in love with this young girl, and had asked her hand in marriage. President Favre was highly flattered by this alliance; both her father and her suitor, however, had to submit to her wishes. The latter did so with very good grace !

"If you were forsaking me for another man," he told her, "I should be inconsolable; since it is for God, I renounce every claim."

According to St Francis de Sales, a young girl should show every mark of consideration and respect for her parents, even though she may have had to endure their injustice. But he did not admit their right to decide for her either whether she will marry or take the veil. Upon this he was adamant. He would not permit Mademoiselle Favre to be opposed in her desire to become a nun, and neither would he allow a nun, who had been forced by her mother to enter the convent, to remain in the Order of the Visitation.

In those days when parental authority was considered absolute, such a stand was both original and bold. I am almost tempted to believe that conditions have not changed greatly, so frequently are young girls coerced into marriage, instead of having impressed on them the importance of the step they are about to take, wherein the happiness of their lives is at stake. St Francis de Sales teaches us that it is the duty of parents to propose and suggest, but to the young girl alone belongs the right of choice.

"There is a certain process to be followed," he wrote in the "Introduction to a Devout Life," "if a marriage is to bring happiness to a young girl. First, a desirable marriage-partner should be suggested to her; then, she should accept him as a prospective husband; finally, she should freely consent to marry him." Accepting and consenting are not the same. An interval should ensue between these two steps, to allow time for the young lady to make up her mind. It is important for her to

know her suitor and her own heart before she becomes engaged.

For marriage is serious, lasting, unalterable. "Marriage," the Saint explained to a young man who had asked his advice and who, it seemed to him, was not yet sure enough of himself to justify him in shouldering the responsibilities of raising a family, "is an Order in which one must take one's vows before entering upon the novitiate; if there were a year of trial, as there is before one may take the vows in a monastery, very few would go through with it."

He is too realistic; he knew family life too intimately not to know the daily trials encountered by married couples. He considers it appropriate, therefore, that they cross the threshold of marriage hand in hand, with courage and confidence, with a similar faith and hope. He does not minimize the difficulties that may arise in the future; the parties concerned, however, should insist upon suspending judgment until a reasonable time has elapsed. He deems it expedient for them to study their individual characters so as to know each other thoroughly, thus preparing themselves to assume their responsibilities with courage and patience.

He did not hesitate to warn a deformed young girl who was very eager to be married that her path would be thornier than most.

"The married state," he informed her, "is one that requires more virtue and constancy than any other; it is a perpetual exercise of mortification; in your case, perhaps, it will be unusually so."

Only courtesy made him add "perhaps." How he would have condemned these hasty unions of today that are contracted after a few days' acquaintance and as quickly broken! How he would admonish these young maidens, barely out of high school or college, convent or boarding-school, who rush into marriage as if it were merely another tango, only to learn with bewildered astonishment after a few months that their life-partner is an utter stranger! Situations such as these explain why we meet gay, young men, not yet twenty-five, and pretty, twenty-year-old dolls, who are already divorced.

In selecting a husband, no one could take too many pains, or be too far-sighted. Madame Brulart had in mind for her daughter, a handsome young man whose past life had not been too promising, hoping that, after marriage, his wife's influence would cause him to mend his ways. When she asked the Bishop's advice about it, he warned her that it was tempting God to confide the future of a young girl to so unreliable a suitor before he had given any indication that he would reform. He knew full well that more often the opposite is likely to happen, that in such fine attempts to reform the husband the wife herself was likely to be lost. A contemporary novelist, Marcel Prevost, has provided an excellent example of this psychological truth in "Peter and Teresa."

Marriage bestows a dignity all its own. St Francis de Sales advises a young girl to prepare for it by sounding the depths of her own heart, by accepting the burdens of marriage with staunch, unflinching courage and by meeting its trials with a love that renders sacrifice sweet. He

appreciated the fact that our feelings increase in direct proportion to the importance we attach to them. Hence, whatever tends to direct the imagination and heart of a young girl into the broad avenue of an imperishable and irrevocable love will set her feet on a pathway she will never desert. The wedding dress, regal and white, so enthusiastically donned by brides, is an emblem of the royalty offered to a wife in the kingdom of her husband's heart, and is, at the same time, a symbol of her stainless purity.

CHAPTER V

THE MARRIED WOMAN

GOD Himself, through the sacrament of marriage, opens the door of their new dwelling to husband and wife. But they are human with all the inherent weaknesses of man and woman.

St Francis de Sales is usually represented as a smiling and lovable optimist. Those who do so, however, either have not read his works, or have not understood what they read. I have mentioned the fact that he differentiated between the two domains in man. No moralist ever had deeper insight into the lower of these two domains than he. But there is another side to everyone, the tabernacle in which dwells the real *ego*. On the one hand there are men; on the other, God, from whose viewpoint all human affairs must be considered. St Francis de Sales' optimism proceeds from this duality:

"Man without devotion," he wrote — and read into these words, if you prefer, without religion, or even without any seeking after perfection — "is a coarse animal, harsh and severe. Husbands ought to desire their wives to be devout, for without devoutness woman is extremely fragile and subject to fall, or to tarnish her virtue."

Between the so-called optimism of St Francis de Sales

and the similarly-termed pessimism of Pascal, there is not so great a difference as superficial commentators would lead us to think. Pascal, even if he does voice a tragic conception of human destiny is, quite like the author of the "Introduction," confident in the supernatural joy which proceeds from a trust in God.

"Let us not give way to sadness," wrote Pascal to Mademoiselle de Roannex, "and let us not believe that piety consists only in an unconsolable bitterness. True piety, which is found in its perfection only in Heaven, is so full of satisfaction and sweetness that it gladdens the beginning of life, and crowns with joy the end. It is a light so dazzling and brilliant that it renders radiant everything it touches. If, especially in the beginning, sadness is mingled with it, this sadness must be attributed to our lack of virtue, and once this handicap is overcome, the result cannot fail to be joy unmixed." Might one not mistake this for a passage from the "Devout Life" ? Whereas the "coarse animal, harsh and severe," that St Francis refers to, sounds like something Pascal might have written. St Francis de Sales, however, is intent upon taming that animal, relying upon the power of love to do so.

Although the capacity for emotion varies with the individual, yet the object of that emotion may be infinite. Human nature is the same the world over, whether in its quest for love, it craves God or some human being. The object of our love may change, but never does love die in our hearts.

"Those who are in love in a purely instinctive way,"

writes St Francis de Sales, "always centre their thoughts on the object loved. Because their hearts are overflowing with love, their lips continually sing the praises of the one they love; when they are parted they lose no opportunity to manifest their passion by letters. There is no tree on whose bark they do not desire to carve the name of their beloved. In like manner, those who love God cannot cease to think of Him, aspire after Him, speak of Him, live for Him. They would wish, if it were possible, to inscribe on the breast of every living creature the holy and sacred name of Jesus."

Similarly, in the "Treatise on the Love of God," he does not disdain to lift the lowly terms of human love to the exalted plane of divine love.

Since our capacity for emotion is individual, it is possible to sanctify it. "I exhort the married, above all," adjured St Francis de Sales, "to practise that love one for the other which is so often recommended to them in Holy Scripture. Husbands and wives, it is meaningless to say: 'Love each other instinctively,' for a pair of turtle doves does that; nor is it any better to say, 'love each other with a human love,' for pagans have practised that love. But I say to you, in the words of the great Apostle: 'Husbands, love your wives as Christ our Blessed Lord loves His Church. Wives, love your husbands as the Church loves her Saviour.' As God gave Eve to our first father, Adam, so too has He fastened the links that bind your marriage. Why do you not love each other with a love that is holy, sacred, divine ?"

In this paragraph, our Saint struck a note, clear, true,

marvellously sweet, one not sounded since the earliest centuries of the Church and one that contrasted strangely with the too-knowing irony of Montaigne and the ribald laughter of Rabelais at the conjugal desires of Panurge.

The sacrament of matrimony has invested human love with an indissoluble character; it has stamped a fragile, inconstant thing with an eternal impress. Is not the first word we utter, when in love, the very word that should never fall from our lips, — always ? We are not masters of the morrow, neither do we wish a vague happiness, uncertain and furtive. Everything in us and about us is frail and precarious. Wishing to push back the curtain of time, because the gift of the present moment, and of our hearts, seems insufficient, with a single word we bestow the future, which we ourselves know not, upon someone who knows it no better than we. One moment of exaltation, or of illusion, is enough to make us firmly confident that our love will never change in this world where everything changes.

But this exaltation, this illusion, may become real and permanent in the sacred love of a Christian marriage. Yes, all created things change, and we, too, change with the changing years. Beauty passes and youth, even charm itself. But never does that love cease, which, exceeding beauty, youth and charm, is more lasting than any other attraction because it draws its inexhaustible power to live and endure, not from the mind but from the heart, not from sensual delights but from a love, which, like a refreshing oasis, is always verdant and alluring because it source is divine.

Such a love cannot be too safely guarded. For even an indissoluble love may not be faithful. St Francis de Sales distinguishes between fidelity and indissolubility in love. He understands the human heart, so eager to be distracted, even momentarily, from sacred duties and irksome responsibilities. Self-confidence increases this desire for distraction. We do not really wish to leave our little enclosed garden; we only wish to peep over the fence to see life, as if we did not possess all of life within us. And yet, in an unguarded moment, we may discover an opening in that fence; then, a fleeting instant becomes an hour, and that hour, treason. No psychologist has given us a more complete and concise analysis of all the obscure feelings, apparently harmless, perhaps delicate and tenuous, which are the first links of passion — links strangely resistant — seemingly light and golden like filmy spider-webs in the sun, yet often indestructible.

One should not trifle with love. St Francis de Sales is not the first moralist to advance this statement. All moralists, indeed, have proclaimed it, but he has done so better than anyone else, more deftly and precisely, and with a more convincing enthusiasm. He was fully conscious of that desire, in women, to be loved which so often precedes love itself. One may not wish to love, but the mere state of being loved is an emotional experience, endowed with a voluptuousness all its own.

"What do you think you are doing ? Bestowing love ? Not at all ! No one gives voluntarily without of necessity receiving as well; he who accepts in this game is captured. . . The fire of love is more active and pene-

trating than you may think; you believe that you have only caught a spark, but you will be astonished to see that, in a moment, it has lighted up your whole heart, reducing your every resolution to ashes and your reputation to smoke. . . How foolish to believe that you can charm love and mould it to suit your desires !"

Then again, love disguises itself under the garb of friendship. "It is very easy," this wise spiritual director remarked when consulted by two penitents who believed they were acquitting themselves of their conjugal obligations by practising a physical fidelity, "it is very easy to be loyal and true to a husband or wife in actual deed, but it is not so easy to be so in heart and mind." "The value of a friendship depends upon what it is based." There is a spiritual friendship, one that is "productive of good." And there is a holy friendship of which no one has spoken more truthfully, and no one has exemplified it more beautifully than St Francis de Sales. But, between a man and a woman, friendship, even when entered into in good faith, is prompt to seek other paths. "Several years may elapse," he wrote, "before anything may happen which directly imperils chastity of the body. This process is gradual, being built up slowly by an enervating of the heart by desires, longings, sighs, gallantries, and other delightful nonsense, all of them excused under various pretexts."

Women ordinarily begin by faint little complaints about the limitations, the narrowness, perhaps unhappiness, of their lives, by sighing because they are not loved, or not sufficiently loved, for love alone interests them. Or else

they skilfully enlist sympathy by arousing pity. Every beautiful sentiment, every noble and disinterested one, is awakened in a desire to please, to allure. And men, captivated by these innocent snares, strut around magnanimously displaying their emotions as peacocks flaunt their glorious plumage. Directly a man affects knowing, sympathetic glances, the woman or girl should be on her guard. For what are the after effects of this comedy of generosity herein represented so minutely ? St Francis de Sales, who is punctilious about using words correctly, refuses to apply the word love to these worldly liaisons. He calls them *petty love-affairs* to signify their evanescence. But, like the shadow of the walnut-tree on the vine, they dim the beauty of souls by depriving them of sunlight.

It is for this reason that such relationships should be avoided. "It is no easy matter," he admits, "to prevent these significant glances, to refuse to give or receive love, to obviate the necessity of granting or accepting little favors or tokens of esteem, to refrain from uttering or listening to cajoling words." The conquest is won only in the beginning. Later it will be well-nigh impossible to disentangle ourselves from the snares in which we are trapped. Napoleon insisted that, in love, the only victory is in flight. Long before his time, the Bishop of Geneva warned those who were in this predicament: "Changing one's residence is an excellent means of allaying passions and worries, whether they arise from sorrow or from love." And he quotes from St Ambrose, the case of a young man who, madly in love with a woman en-

gaged to be married, took a long trip, returning cured of his infatuation. He later met the young lady, who, surprised at his indifference, inquired:

"Don't you recognize me? Surely I have not changed."

"No," he replied, "but I have changed."

If going away is impracticable, then all private conversation should be prohibited, and even the sympathetic exchange of glances; or else all relations should be sharply broken off once and for all. "I beseech," he pleads, "I implore all who are guilty of these petty love-affairs, pluck them out of your lives; split them, break them asunder; it will not be enough to dispose of these foolish friendships lightly; they must be annihilated. Do not untie the knots that join you; break them or cut them ruthlessly, for the bonds themselves are worthless and are not worth saving. It is senseless to dally with a love which is opposed to the love of God." He realizes that after the rupture many memories will linger, like the marks left by irons or chains that have been worn for penance. They, too, must be wiped out systematically, for even they are enough to cause the whole affair to come to life again.

Such vain and futile friendships melt like snow in the sun. The friendship of marriage is, on the contrary, the very bread of life. It is a friendship, based not on bodily attractions alone, but on the mind and heart. The tenderness of a man ought to make him find delight in protecting his wife, treating her as a being, frail and weak, who needs his strength and even his patience. For, ac-

cording to St Francis de Sales, the husband is the head of the family, and his wife's affection for him should be accompanied by respect. "Your sex," he wrote to the Abbess Marie de Beauvillier, "desires to be led, and never has it succeeded in any enterprise except by submission; not that, in many cases, it is less enlightened than the male sex, but because God has ordained it so."

His extensive experience as a spiritual advisor did not lead him to believe in equality between the sexes, and even in marriage he favored a patriarchal order. If he did not foresee our modern feminists, it was perhaps because he did not believe in the possibility of the emancipation of woman. He knew great-souled women, women of a calibre rarely encountered today. Where are our modern Madame de Chantals, our Marie de Beauvilliers, our Madame Acaries, and our Mother Angelicas ? It is not difficult to detect his influence on them; but he himself was influenced by none of them, not even by Madame de Chantal. He was content to form *Salesians,* and among the virtue he proposed to them, obedience occupied a prominent place — a loving obedience which renders duty a joy. The so-called gentleness of St Francis de Sales never flattered anyone.

Monotony and jealousy are the two chief enemies to marital happiness. The constant repetition of familiar acts and situations, instead of resulting in monotony, should be made every day to increase the love between husband and wife, instead of diminishing it. Monotony in marriage engenders indifference and causes the slow

but sure destruction of love. Yet monotony does not threaten either paternal love, or filial love; it strengthens them for each new day. Why, then, is it harmful to the love of man and wife? The reason is simple. Unless great vigilance is exercised, there is a depth of bitterness, even hostility, to be found in the love of husband and wife. Alfred de Vigny could truthfully refer to the hatred which exists between the two sexes. Covetousness, brutality, cruelty, satiety, repugnance, scorn, cowardice, all these ignoble passions are ingrained in us. The heart must hold the upper hand over this thundering army, and must exercise an ever increasing vigilance. A love that is never voiced, that ungratefully overlooks past devotion and service, that feels no necessity of proving its worth, such a love is already diseased. It is the forerunner of those well known crises in middle age which novelists have so often analyzed. Indeed, to a certain extent, it is responsible for them. "Love and fidelity," taught St Francis de Sales, "engender peace and happiness."

Every exterior manifestation of friendship and love between husband and wife, St Francis de Sales believed, is important in maintaining family affection. He knew that a cold exterior freezes the heart, just as a kindly welcome warms it. He was not taken in by those strong, silent, self-possessed men who have nothing but their exteriors to recommend them; were they great, they would condescend to be affable instead of expanding their energy in a vain effort to defend their assumed grandeur like a tower, besieged but impregnable. St Louis, who was truly a great king, "could easily change from the

martial, courageous warrior to the gentle, devoted husband, performing all the loving offices so requisite to the preservation of conjugal love." For "although trifling evidences of a pure, candid friendship do not of necessity bind hearts irrevocably, yet they serve as a means of bringing about a closer union, and they form the basis of pleasant, agreeable conversation." "Women," says Tertullian, "you should please your husbands only, to whom likewise you should never appear disagreeable."

A spiritual director is allowed greater latitude than a moralist. With amazing dexterity St Francis de Sales made use of this freedom to throw light upon and explain a host of situations which he did not actually discuss in so many words. I need, therefore, only point out in his doctrine on marriage the part played by psychology and convention. We might take for example one of the most obvious and frequently discussed questions in contemporary French drama — most obvious, but also most elusive. Our dramatists frequently base their plays upon marital misfortune, but seldom do they show the responsibility of the husband for his wife's infidelity. In "Amoureuse" M. de Porto-Riche has boldly treated this question, which St Francis de Sales has covered in one single sentence:

"If you yourselves teach them evil," he warns husbands, "is it any wonder that you have to bear the disgrace of losing them ?"

And how often has his phrase been repeated that "a woman's virtue is her honor." They must be constantly on their guard to preserve this virtue; wives should dis-

trust those who praise their beauty and their grace, "for whoever praises an article of merchandise that he cannot purchase, is likely to be strongly tempted to steal it." They should refuse to listen to criticism of their husbands. A wily enemy has more than one trick or device, it is true, and therefore, he can praise a husband to perfection and not pay a single compliment to the wife; but, underneath the words, is the tone. All these "minor attacks" should be discerned. "The soul can be poisoned by the ear as the body is by the mouth." Hence complacency and flirtatiousness should be avoided.

The second danger from which St Francis de Sales wishes to guard marriage is jealousy. He looks upon it as evidence of a love that is incomplete and generally degrading. For jealousy does not lift love to a higher plane, as is often believed; it lowers and corrupts human affection. It clouds the intellect, and makes it impossible for one to perform one's daily duties as one should. To provoke it is to kill affection. What can a man do with his life if he is ever afraid that someone is ready to plunge a dagger in his back ?

Lastly, the author of the "Introduction to a Devout Life" entreats husband and wife to avoid scenes. The Holy Spirit does not abide in a house "where arguments, sharp retorts, bickering and altercations are frequent." When either husband or wife is in a bad humor, if no immediate remedy is possible, they should keep to themselves and not vent their irritability upon each other. If one party is caustic, the other must be patient; thus there

will be no disputes. In all justice, each one should have a turn at these displays of temper, but some people monopolize everything. It is impossible entirely to forget these painful experiences; some sting from them always remains; and words escape, sometimes only too true, which reveal hidden wounds and resentments, which are never forgotten even though a reconciliation be effected.

St Francis de Sales, who wrote his "Book of Controversies" when he was laboring to convert Chablais early in his career, abandoned religious polemics as ineffectual. Recall the answer of Cardinal du Perron, who, because of his scholarly attainments, was known everywhere as the "scourge of heretics." When he was requested to interest himself in some gentlemen who were considering giving up Protestantism, he replied:

"If you wish to convince or refute them in matters of actual fact, you may bring them to me; for, thanks be to God, I have sufficient knowledge to defend Catholic truth; but, if your design is to convert them, take them to the Bishop of Geneva, who has received that gift from God."

Although he would have argued courteously with the Protestants, St Francis de Sales did not believe in argument. "Argument," he wrote, "however restrained it may be, does not always bring out the truth; it does show the knowledge or the skill of the disputants; it effects no conversions."

What statement could be more true of the world we live in ? What results have been achieved by these end-

less conferences between nations? To what end are the interminable debates of legislative bodies? And in a home given up to controversy, what becomes of peace and cordial understanding? Not that one person should have the final say upon every question so that the government of the household gradually becomes despotic; but a good example, patience, and radiant truth are better weapons than a harsh discussion wherein each one seeks to shine, to dazzle, or to dominate rather than to convince.

Such are the views of St Francis de Sales in regard to marriage. I have outlined his teachings from a human standpoint, rather than a religious one. His knowledge of the heart of man constantly demonstrates the necessity of having recourse to God when through human frailty we falter in doing right. It is God who sanctifies marriage, and it is to God that husband and wife must look for "strength to support their burdens." He alone ennobles love and preserves it. Without Him the flesh and the spirit are in league to taint or despoil, degrade or destroy, bit by bit, the tenderest affection. He alone authorizes eternal promises, as He gives a soul to children born of the flesh. Family life will prosper under His guidance. And if it should happen that either husband or wife is untrue to the marriage vows, the other party is not thereby freed from his or her obligations. If one half of a crew falls asleep or abandons a ship, the other half is responsible for its safe arrival in port. Duty does not cease with infidelity. "The un-

faithful man," says St Paul, "is sanctified by a faithful wife, and an unfaithful wife by a faithful husband." But, the indissoluble link, even when strained, does not break.

CHAPTER VI

THE WIDOW

THERE is one class of women for whom St. Francis de Sales labored tirelessly, endeavoring to console them or to preserve them in virtue. To the particular needs of widows he consecrates a chapter in his "Introduction to a Devout Life."

Montaigne, in Book II of the "Essays," in the chapter entitled "Concerning Three Good Women," informs us that in his century, which was also that of the Bishop of Geneva, women "would more often display the depth of their affection for their husbands after death; then, at least, they strove to manifest their goodwill. How belated a manifestation and how unseasonable ! By doing so they proved rather that they loved them only when dead. Their lives were filled with altercation, their deaths with love and courtesy." In vain did they dishevel their hair and give vent to their grief. "Their sorrow is odious to the living and futile for the dead. We should be willing for them to laugh after our death, provided that they had laughed while we were alive. Does it not seem like the quintessence of hatred to weep and wail over the death of a man whom we despised and disliked ? If there is any honor in mourning husbands, it belongs to wives who rendered them happy in life; all

others should be merry after their husbands' death." And Montaigne can name only three women who loved their husbands enough to die with them. But one of them should not be counted: "She was of low degree, and among people of her station in life, it is not unusual to hear of instances of uncommon goodness. The other two were rich noblewomen, among whom virtue is rarely found."

As for the mourning of men, Montaigne might have quoted the old saying:

Two happy days come in a man's life,
The day he takes a bride and the day he buries a wife.

This is, however, a very pessimistic notion, and for it St Francis de Sales offers no cure.

In several different places in the "Introduction to a Devout Life" he discusses the problems of widows. While he does not actually forbid second marriages — an error condemned by Tertullian — yet he does not encourage them. Widows, he says, are called by God to practise the virtues peculiar to their state, and have special need of Him.

"To love a husband while he is alive," he writes, "is trivial enough; but to love him so much after death that no other can fill his place is a degree of love that belongs only to true widows. To trust in God while a husband is at hand to support and protect a wife, is not such a rare occurrence; but, to trust in God when this support has been removed, this is worthy of praise unstinted. Wid-

owhood, therefore, is the mirror which reflects the perfection of virtues, practised in marriage."

In the chapter on propriety in dress St Francis de Sales advises widows to be more modest in their apparel than wives. Nor is this all. He counsels them also to be prudent and discreet.

"To desire to remain a widow and yet to enjoy being flattered, caressed, cajoled; to be anxious to attend balls, parties, and festivities; to wish to be perfumed and bedizened — that is being a widow with the body alive and the soul dead."

Mourning can even serve as a sign of coquetry. The Bishop of Geneva, keen-sighted and shrewd as he was, knew that black forms an admirable background for the dazzling glory of a white skin. He knew, too, that a woman makes a more dangerous appeal to the hearts of men than a young girl."

"A widow, having had more experience in the ways of pleasing men, throws bait more luring." He is perfectly cognizant, too, of the fact that she is more subject to temptation, like fruits which, no longer intact, are preserved with difficulty. For this reason he continually counsels and exhorts her.

"A true widow," he says, "like a little March violet exhales unparallelled sweetness by the fragrance of her devotion." Like the violet, she dwells in retirement "the better to protect the freshness of her heart."

His correspondence was full of letters of condolence to women who had lost a husband or a child. When sor-

row struck down Madame de la Fléchère, Madame de Charmoisy, Madame Murat de la Croix and Madame de Sauteron, his tender heart felt the blow. With compelling gentleness, he bade them submit to Providence. In this submission their suffering would become more bearable. To live is to accept.

"The God of all goodness," he wrote to his cousin, Madame de Murat de la Croix, "without doubt will descend to you, entering into your heart to sustain you in this tribulation, if only you will cast yourself into His fatherly arms, resigning yourself to His care. It is God who gave you your husband, and it is He Who has taken him away from you; God must comfort you in your affliction. . . Our nature is so constituted that we die at an unseen hour. This we cannot escape. We must be patient, therefore, and must use our intellects to help us endure a sorrow that we cannot avoid. Then, too, look at God and His Blessed eternity in which all our losses will be repaired, and where our dear ones, separated from us by death, will be restored to us."

To Madame de Sauteron in Grenoble, who had prematurely lost her husband, admirable in heart, mind, and character, he brings similar consolation:

"O how blessed are those, who, living in constant danger of death, are always ready to die; so that they may live eternally in a life where death is no more! Our beloved dead was of that number, I am sure. That alone, Madame, is enough to console us; for in a few days, or at most, in a few years, we too, shall follow him. The friendships and ties which bound us in this world

will be resumed, never again to be broken. Meanwhile, let us be patient, and courageously await the hour of our departure to go to meet those whom we have loved; and since our love for them was sincere, let us continue to love them, doing out of love for them what we know they would wish us to do."

Pascal, after his father's death, developed the same thought in his "Very Consoling Discourse to those who have sufficient liberty of mind to accept sorrow." But, his is a heart less ardent and tender.

"I have learned," he wrote, "that one of the greatest comforts in affliction and one of the most sincere proofs of our love for our dear departed ones, is to act as they would request us to do if they were alive, and to follow out their holy counsels."

Death is not the end of love. The good Bishop made use of the very words of the dead to encourage those who survived. He begged Madame de Sauteron in her sorrow to resume her efforts to carry out her deceased husband's wishes; to execute faithfully the task he had left to her alone, that of training their children in wisdom and piety. In no other way could she give a more enduring proof of the permanence of her affection.

He will not admit that we should be depressed or discouraged even at the most cruel losses. All these bitter partings should awaken, on the contrary, a broader understanding of life and love. This separation leads us to God; but it also brings God to us. We should suffer no sorrow to escape us without extracting from it the gold of its eternal value. God does not send sorrow to crush

and dishearten us. One often hears the phrase these days, *live one's own life.* No other moralist has ever preached that doctrine more truthfully than St Francis de Sales. He directs us to live our lives to the very end, bravely, without fear of failing, to render useful and beautiful, to perfect each day, mindful of its divine goal. To do this is to live. For death itself is only the dawn of another life. "Death," he wrote to Madame de Chantal, "means no longer to live the old life, but to embrace the new."

BIBL. STUD.
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CHAPTER VII

THE IDEAL WOMAN

I HAVE, doubtless, conveyed a very imperfect idea of the teachings of St Francis de Sales. "I do not desire," he said, "a devotion that is fantastic, vulgar, melancholy, disagreeable, or gloomy, but a piety that is gracious, gentle, sweet, lovable, and peaceful; in a word, a frank piety that is first beloved of God and then of men." This type of piety adapts itself to every duty, to every condition of life. Martha and Mary, St Francis de Sales teaches, are one; Martha can pray while sewing or attending to the duties of her household. It is with a real poetic feeling that our Saint glorifies what he terms "the spindle and the distaff." Eugénie de Guérin washing clothes in the sunshine, and Francis Jammes singing "the beauty that God gives to every-day life" are his disciples, several generations removed.

With the aid of the "Introduction to a Devout Life" it is a simple matter to sketch a portrait of the virtuous woman as St Francis de Sales would have her.

She should be devout, pious if you will. "Devoutness is merely a spiritual vivacity and agility by means of which charity acts in us and we act through it, promptly and lovingly." But the marvellous phase of devotion is, that it assumes a thousand forms, because its first duty is

to adapt itself to every condition of life. "It must be exercised in a different manner by gentleman and artisan, by valet and prince, by mother and daughter, and even by wives; nay, more, the practice of devotion must be accommodated to one's strength, one's business, and one's individual duties." What would you think of a bishop who sought solitude like a Carthusian? Of a workman who spent his time in church, like a monk? Of a household which gave as little thought to the morrow as a Capuchin? Would you not deem their devotion "ridiculous, ill-regulated, and insufferable?" And the world, which does not discern the difference between true devotion and that which is improper, holds the former responsible for the blunders caused by the latter.

The most important virtues are those suitable to our state in life. "A lawyer should know how to pass from prayer to pleading; a merchant to trading; a married woman to the duties of her family and the numerous occupations of her household; each so gently and peacefully that his peace of mind is never troubled." Religion is recognizable because it always tends toward order, not toward disorder. The piety which disturbs a woman in her daily life is not good piety; on this point the teaching of St Francis de Sales is very definite. The first and most important duty of a woman who follows his rules is to make her home the abode of happiness and love. Woman can invite God to come to her dwelling when she is unable to seek Him in church. He will never fail to respond to her invitation.

It would be a mistake to think that he felt that women

should all go about in the garb of Visitandine nuns. Far from it ! In the matter of dress, St Francis de Sales thought it should be modest and appropriate. "Exterior neatness, in some indefinable manner, reflects purity of interior." He did not think well of untidy and unkempt people. Socrates challenged a philosopher, ostentatiously clad in rags, with the remark: "Through these holes, I perceive your vanity !"

"A married woman," says St Francis de Sales, "should dress herself becomingly to please her husband; if she does so when he is away, people will inquire whose eyes it is that she would favor with this particular care." It would not even astound our Saint if these devout women, in an assemblage of people in which their husbands were present, were the best-dressed, for their grace, simple, modest, and serious, would only add lustre to their good taste. Moreover, the question of age should not pass unnoticed. "The world laughs at old people who try to beautify themselves." This maxim is worthy of deep consideration on the part of some of our grandmothers who deck themselves out in their old age with all the trappings of a circus-horse, from paint and powder, to jewels and gaudy garments, and appear at fashionable gatherings looking like carnival floats.

She will appear elegant because she has a sure sense of what is fitting. She will avoid extremes, and anything that borders on flamboyant brilliancy. Also she will beware of that fashion of dress, the reverse of coquetry, which consists in parading one's modesty. When in society, she will speak neither too much nor too little;

"for, to hold aloof, cold and severe, refusing to contribute one's share of all the familiar little devices which make conversation so agreeable, is evidence of a lack of confidence or some sort of disdain; while, to babble and prattle incessantly without giving others the opportunity to speak at will, savors of vapidness and flippancy." She must know how to be entertaining without indulging in empty chatter; she must avoid the charlatanism of pretentious silence which seems to scorn everything. She should beware of rash judgments, and of that opposite of slander, which the perspicacity of St Francis de Sales so skilfully exposed, the habit of condoning everything and not differentiating between right and wrong.

"If it happens that the evil that is spoken of a person is true, do not say to excuse him that he is candid and upright; if another is referred to as manifestly vain, do not praise his generosity and sincerity; and do not call dangerous intimacies, simplicity or naïveté."

No, "we should honestly and openly call evil by its right name." There are those who achieve a reputation for benevolence and kindliness by merely praising everyone and everything. It is not fitting, however, that talent, honor, and virtue should be put on the same footing with frivolity, dishonor, and vice. Today, more than ever, this lesson is useful, today when a hostess no longer vouches for her guests; when we are forced to rub elbows with a host of hybrid people, come no one knows whence, whose fortunes were made no one knows how, and introduced no one knows by whom.

An abundance of practical counsel flows from the pen

of St Francis de Sales: to rise early in the morning, to say one's prayers, and if possible, to hear Mass, which he calls the "sun" of prayer, before the routine of the house has resumed its course, always subordinating, however, the length of one's devotions to one's duties; to be diligent in every occupation without upsetting things or spoiling them by too great haste; to administer temporal affairs conscientiously but in a spirit of detachment (wealth is a means, not an end); to bear sickness cheerfully, accepting it as God sends it; to be patient and uncomplaining; and lastly to perform those little duties, that are necessary if the household is to run smoothly, so unobtrusively that no one is conscious of them.

This is not enough. He warns Philothea against a whole series of sentimental diseases which seem not to attack the soul, yet which weaken it, rendering it anæmic and producing a sort of fatal apathy. These are worry, sadness, and discouragement. One loses confidence in oneself; one carries on day after day without enthusiasm or zest; one no longer takes pleasure in anything, and gradually one becomes hurt and embittered. It is a dangerous state, from which one must shake oneself loose; seldom is it that one goes through life without experiencing it. The important thing is not to allow oneself to remain in this state of mind and to do everything possible to avoid being thus engulfed. These sterilities of the heart are depressing and painful. Like weeds in a garden, they choke the flowers. They should be carefully rooted out.

Philothea may mingle with the world, but she must not

be of it. She must beware of what Pascal terms the "delightful and criminal ways of the world." For she should practise the virtues the world scorns, chief among which is poverty. Poverty in wealth can be very successfully practised. It does not consist in relinquishing one's possessions. "These possessions are not really ours, for God has given them to us to cultivate and make useful, consequently we may render Him acceptable service by taking care of them." Taking care of them, yes, but for the use which God wills and not for our own selfish purposes. When he said: "Blessed are the poor in heart," Jesus was referring to those genuinely humble, whether or not they were endowed with riches. And in this same "Sermon on the Mount" did he not also say: "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house" ? Each individual is responsible for the talents God has given him; he must render them fruitful. "Love the poor and poverty," St Francis de Sales said to Philothea, "for by this love you will become truly poor." He even encourages her to become poorer than the poor, to be their servant.

By piety love is transformed. More than once, the reader must doubtless have thought that the doctrine of St Francis de Sales could be adapted to a love marriage only. But his teaching did not adapt itself to love; it created love. By his counsel he induces a young girl to prepare herself for love, to think of it, and to give herself to it. His doctrine forces a wife, each day, to revivify her love, to press it tenderly to her heart. What

can a woman do, however, if it should happen, as it frequently does, that her husband is mediocre ? But are we not all, in great measure, impelled by the force of our feelings ? Take, for example, Elise, in the novel by M. René Boylesve, who, without the safeguards of matrimony, indulged freely in her irregular passion. Note with what care a woman in love makes a sort of religion out of her guilty love, so great is her need for something to worship. When she perceived that she herself had furnished the fuel for the fire that was consuming her, she found her only solace in the thought of death. God, on the contrary, is the refuge of Philothea, God in the depths of Whose Fatherly Heart she can bury all her trials.

Are we not surprised, when we meet some great hero of a tragic or marvellous adventure, to discover him so ordinary and insignificant ? Illusion is certainly not everything in daily life, but we can scarcely do without a little of it. The wife, therefore, whose love for her husband approaches devotion, or whose devotion approximates love, can she not succeed in producing the sacred spark even if the material she works with is mediocre ?

In another contemporary novel, "Priscilla Sévérac," by Madame Marcella Tinayre, a vulgar bourgeois family, the vilest and most insignificant of families, is subdued, only temporarily, I admit, by the mere presence in the house of an old peasant woman from Auvergne, who is unselfish to the point of being self-sacrificing. In the country I once knew a drunken peasant, brutal and violent, who was married to one of those saints still to be

found in the provinces in France, and even in Paris. Without a word, merely by her patience and her gentleness, she made her husband so respect her that, one by one, he gave up his vices. And when she died, he said to me: "Without her I am worthless."

Madame de Stael, disillusioned, once remarked when she was feeling particularly melancholy: "The purpose of life is not happiness, but perfection." The gradual perfectioning of women throughout the past three centuries can in part be traced to the influence of St Francis de Sales. Conscientious women, who, with their fine, delicate instincts, steal away from temptation, even though their hearts are weak — such women as Madame de Couaen in Sainte-Beuve's "Voluptuousness," Madame de Mortsauf in Balzac's "Lily of the Valley," and Madame de Nièvres in Fromentin's "Dominique" — all have indirectly inherited the virtues preached to Philothea. To Christianity and its early Fathers, but most particularly to the great doctor, St Francis de Sales, whose influence for good has been so extensive and prolonged, do we owe in great measure the sanctity of our homes, the vitality of our family life, the moral delicacy of our women and that individual type of Frenchwoman, the embodiment of spiritualized affection, who endows the home over which she presides with grace and charm.

Today, I am assured, this type of refined gentlewoman with high ideals is becoming rare, and that the bacchantes have been let loose upon us. Are these emancipated women sure that by flinging their love to the four corners of the earth they will increase its worth over that of their

older sisters who carefully shielded the flame of a single love as if it were the sanctuary lamp before the altar of their hearts ?

One sentence in the "Introduction to a Devout Life" epitomizes the whole volume with a vigor whose forcefulness has never been exceeded either by Bossuet or by Pascal. After having reminded women of the pangs of childbirth, St Francis de Sales states: "You have conceived Jesus in your soul, you must give birth to Him by the daily imitation of His life, and eternal joy will be yours."

Philosophers and artists have urged us to look upon our lives as statues that we chisel and carve day by day. But not one of them has thus brought to our attention the fact that God is within us. In our every-day struggle against our passions, we are climbing the ladder of Jacob. From the very bottom rung we can see all of Heaven before us. Scholars and critics may continue to refer to the sweetness and softness of St Francis de Sales, but no one has ever more charmingly invited us to undertake a more difficult and painful ascent. The greatest educators of the will have not formulated a more detailed and disciplined plan of life than he. The school of St Francis de Sales is the school of acceptance which gives free play to the will only because it insists upon exacting more of it. By first examining and putting in order our inward lives we achieve a peace and composure which allows us to pursue the most active careers without sacrificing to them our meditative detachment. Thus does

he show us how to live fully rounded and satisfying lives.

Is not Philothea's house that which the queen in "Barberine" describes when she says: "The roof under which a good woman dwells is as holy as a church, and kings have left their palaces for homes that belong to God ?"

And may we not imagine these two most beautiful stanzas of love in the French language on the lips of Philothea:

You called me your life, say rather your soul,
For the soul is immortal and life but a day.

BOOK III

ST FRANCIS DE SALES AND WOMEN OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES and women of the world: the title I have chosen is clumsy, if it is not actually misleading, for as a spiritual director St Francis de Sales was the least susceptible of men to worldly influences and to the amenities of social life. One should be especially careful not to think of him as a popular society preacher, much impressed by the importance of class distinctions; for on the contrary in his eyes the most important characteristic of the upper classes was that they were burdened with greater duties and responsibilities than the other classes. He would have been in entire agreement with Father Fichet when he said: "A true spiritual director does not turn away peasants in order to devote himself to great ladies. . . To him all of God's creatures are equal; his only ambition is to reconcile souls to a Saviour Who Shed His blood to redeem them."

Never did St Francis de Sales either flatter or disdain

anyone. The titles and social position of such women as Madame de Chantal, Madame de la Fléchère and Madame de Charmoisy interested him no more than did the humble station in life of Pernette Boutey, the news of whose death brought tears to his eyes, for he realized that she was truly great before God, or that of the poor widow at Annecy whom he once noticed "following the Blessed Sacrament in a procession. Whereas the others carried large tapers of white wax she had only a crude little candle of her own making. When the wind extinguished her tiny flame, she paid no heed, but with mind and soul intent on the Living Presence of her Lord in the Sacrament, she proceeded with them to church."

He was readily accessible to anyone who wished to see him.

To the annoyance of his servants, the first comer was admitted to his presence, even though he might be a peddler or a quack. An old blind woman would pour out her troubles to him at length, and when she finally left he considered himself indebted to her. He got on famously with the poor and with children, and to the latter he loved to teach the Catechism personally. The calm, serene death of a peasant who had heard God spoken of so highly that he desired to go to see Him, filled our Saint with emotion. He would have loved the reply of an old peasant woman whose friends said encouragingly to her before her death:

"You will go to Heaven, Julienne."

"Well," she answered, "where else would I go?" [1]

He set no store by worldly honors. This is often said of those who do value such things, but who skilfully conceal their pride behind an exterior show of modesty. St Francis de Sales did not scorn such matters — he was utterly oblivious to them. In the "Devout Life" he wrote: "truly noble minds do not concern themselves with all the trivial trash of rank, honors, and titles; they have something better to do; these trifles appeal only to the idle."

In her testimony Madame de Chantal describes how reluctantly he undertook to deliver the funeral orations of princes and princesses, "because," he said, "it forces me to take into account questions of worldly vanity in which, thank God, I am not interested." And as a matter of fact he could never bring himself to write out the eulogy he had pronounced at the funeral of Anne d'Este, Duchess de Guise and later Duchess de Nemours, the original for the Princess de Clèves in Madame de la Fayette's novel.

As his reputation grew, he tried more and more to avoid large cities. "These big cities," he wrote in 1615, "set great store by it [reputation], or so at least it seems to a poor villager like me, not used to their ways." When Henry IV, who both liked and admired him, tried to get him to come to Paris and settle permanently there, he refused very gracefully, saying:

"Sire, I pray your Majesty hold me excused. I have

[1] See: "Le Pays Natal," by Henri Bordeaux.

married a poor wife. I cannot leave her for a rich one."

When Des Hayes, somewhat later, tried to insist upon his accepting an important post in the Church in France, he declined with a smile, saying:

"You cannot teach an old dog new tricks."

Upon his last trip to Paris, in 1619, they wanted to make him coadjutor to the Archbishop, but his one wish was to escape from the Court — "a nest of wasps," he wrote, "hovering desperately about a dead body."

Christine of France, daughter of Henri IV, made him her head chaplain, to his great regret. "The Court," he wrote, "is highly distasteful to me, for it exalts all those worldly pleasures which I am coming to detest more and more; I dislike it, and its wit, and its maxims, and all the rest of its silly nonsense."

Ten days before his death, on December 19, 1622, he wrote a letter, the last in the tenth volume of his correspondence, in which he repeated the same sentiments:

"I have never had much regard for vanity, but I found it infinitely more arrogant amid the hollow grandeur of the Court. . . Let us set our hearts on that life which, alone, merits the name of life, and compared to which the life of the great of this world is but a most wretched death."

He is a "gentlemanly Saint," as an English critic has put it. His family and breeding endowed him with real graciousness and an innate courtesy; when he commanded, it was with a manner so charming that he never seemed severe or domineering. The ceremonious for-

mulas with which he addressed sovereigns did not cloud or blur the truths he wished to drive home. The Duke of Nemours, an irascible and stormy character, was his immediate overlord, yet he did not hesitate to address him in the following terms in defence of some people then on trial:

"One should not credit the testimony of a man who bears witness against his neighbor until the charges have been substantiated, and they cannot be proved until both parties to the case have been heard. Anyone who tries to convince you of the opposite, My Lord, is deceiving you."

Shortly before this he had said the same thing in a sentence as compact and freighted with meaning as the most beautiful of Corneille's verses: "S'il suffit d'accuser, qui sera innocent ?" ["If accusation suffices to condemn a person, who, then, will be innocent ?"] When his prince accused him of disloyalty, he proudly replied: "I am a Savoyard in every sense of the word, both by birth and by my vows." And in his letter to President Frémyot on the death of Henri IV, he rose to the heights of great historical writing, seemingly without effort.

One of his latest commentators, Canon Thamiry, in a treatise on "Influence," demonstrates that all influence is exercised by way of assimilation. Now, this assimilation is neither the result of a penetrating into substances, as Democrites and the empiricists would explain it; nor is it the effect of a pre-established harmony between human beings, as Leibniz holds; nor yet again, is it the manifes-

tation of an underlying identity concealed by superficial differences, as the advocates of monism, from Schopenhauer to Henri Bergson have taught. For the human being either influences or is influenced according to whether his powers of adaptation are active or passive, and in proportion to the degree in which either of these qualities is present. Applying this theory to the influence exercised by St Francis de Sales who, early in his career, renounced controversy in favor of his all-conquering apologetics, Canon Thamiry demonstrates very clearly that St Francis de Sales thought that it is love that dominates our wills and inspires us to strive for perfection. Along these lines he develops his thesis on assimilation and adaptation.

In his "Histoire du sentiment religieux," the Abbé Brémond re-examines the details of St Francis de Sales' seven months' sojourn in Paris in 1602, and concludes that it was responsible for a distinct improvement in his theories and ideas, his cultivation, and his general bearing. It seems to me that the influence of Paris was then not nearly as pronounced as it is today. The paramount importance of Paris in France dates only from the time of Louis XIV. The Court of Burgundy was more refined and had keener artistic susceptibilities than that of the Valois. The humility of St Francis de Sales, who was so ready to classify himself as a "villager," gives one quite a wrong impression of the distinction of his family and of his own education. The courts of the Nemours at Annecy, and of the dukes of Savoy at Chambéry and Turin, were most brilliant. A vivid picture of their

princely luxury can be obtained from the inventories of the castle of Nemours. Then, too, it should not be forgotten that in Savoy they claimed to speak the purest French spoken anywhere, that the first codification of laws ever written in French was drawn up by President Favre, a friend of the Bishop of Geneva, and that Favre's son, Vaugelas, was the first man to reform French grammar. St Francis de Sales, therefore, was not at all the provincial going to Paris to perfect his speech or polish his manners. He was completely at ease at Court, except for the reserve which his virtue prompted him to maintain.

Although it is true that he was indifferent to the fashionable world, he was too dignified, he had too great a sense of human values, to be outraged by it and to flail it in the conventional terms of abuse so often resorted to by those uncouth and barbarous preachers who seem to take a fiendish joy in excoriating all within their reach. He saw no more reason to avoid fashionable ladies than to flatter them. His thirst for souls impelled him to go in search of them in the highways and the byways. In the preface to the "Introduction to a Devout Life," he admits that it is an especially difficult task to direct these fashionable ladies, but that it has its consolations, "like that of the farmer at harvest time, who is increasingly happy the more there is for him to do."

Every day of his priesthood he was sought out in ever increasing numbers by those who sought peace within themselves and the strength to continue life. They came

to him, scarred and wounded. But after all, who is not wounded? For life "is a war . . . rest is reserved for Heaven." Each of his penitents complained as if she were the only one who had to suffer. To each he gave individual advice and consolation. "One should not be surprised," he wrote, "that every plant and flower in a garden requires its own particular care." This advice to various individuals fills ten volumes of his correspondence, yet countless of these letters must have been lost. But to get an adequate conception of his almost miraculous activity, one must remember how his day was broken up by a thousand interruptions and by the many necessities of his episocopal duties and his missions.

The advice he gave these various women lived after him and helped console numerous women suffering from complaints similar to those of the women to whom the letters were originally addressed. For century succeeds century, styles change, political and economic regimes come and go, everything appears fickle, inconstant, precarious, unsubstantial; but the hearts of men still experience the same emotions, and burn with the same passions. Over every life that touches his, he spreads "the spirit of gentleness and simplicity, of love and humbleness, of resignation and purity, of joy and mortification."

M. Paul Bourget quotes the advice of Marcus Aurelius, "Make obstacles the motive whence springs action," adding that this maxim might be attributed to Goethe, that level-headed genius who detested useless expense and superfluous effort and felt that people should mould circumstances to fit their needs instead of bewail-

ing them. In the correspondence of St Francis de Sales I have found the same precept but greatly ennobled: "Make necessity a virtue," he wrote. The words used and the conception behind them are of quite a different order from the maxim of Marcus Aurelius. In place of Marcus Aurelius' "obstacle" our Saint uses "necessity." For obstacles do not exist; there are only occasions of serving God and perfecting ourselves, some of them more difficult than others, some more congenial. And by using the word "virtue" in place of "action," he points out the aim and end toward which we are striving. We must not merely bow before necessity with good grace and resignation; we must love it. Only through love is it transformed into virtue. Often it may seem cruel to us; at times, it may inspire in us resentment and even aversion. But, "he who does not check his dislikes, becomes soft and weak."

We have no control over either our coming or our going in this life, nor over love nor death. Our dependence is born of them; they impose upon us certain obligations. Every moment of our lives we are planning for the future, forgetting that death may deprive us of the chance to fulfill our pledges. It is a waste of time to discuss what is and may not be changed; to do so is to sew the seeds of revolt within ourselves, a revolt which we ourselves must quell — and at what cost! "Do not waste time in discussion," he says, "when action is what is necessary, nor conjure up difficulties; disperse them."

In his spiritual advice, he displayed an ardor, a kind-

ness, a delicacy, and a firmness which increased rather than diminished as he grew older. Far from complaining of the number of his penitents, their persistence or vagaries, he was concerned about them all as if he had only one to consider. I mentioned the fact that he did not remember their faces. Many of them he never even saw. He was intent solely upon their spiritual perfection. In all truth it may be said that, at the age of fifty-five he died of an excess of zeal, of an excess of love for God. Some three hundred years after his death, an erudite scholar from Annecy, the Abbé Gonthier, was able to write up an account of some months of his episcopate, week by week, and often, day by day. Only a man like Napoleon could consider such a task easy.

In addition to his numerous other activities, St Francis de Sales wrote his books. On the eve of his death, did he not remark regretfully that he had never had one entire day to devote to his dear books ? He took time from his sleep; he cut down meal hours, often limiting himself to one repast a day in order to save time. But he did this so discreetly that it was only long afterwards that it was realized what he had done.

In one of his letters he refers to a passage from one of the early Fathers of the Church which states that hens are always attempting more than they can do when they are caring for their chicks, hence their continual clucking, and that the apostle is like them. St Francis de Sales belongs in the same category, for his care for his flock was unceasing.

Did he not write to one of them, Marie-Françoise de

Malarmay de Lauray, "*Amicitia quæ desinere potuit nonquam vera fuit.* The friendships of the children of this world partake of its evanescent nature. The world passes; so, too, all its friendships, but ours is in God, of God, and for God." In his love for souls, however, he ranks them according to their spiritual hierarchy.

In her testimony before his canonization, Madame de Chantal states: "Our Lord inspired the charity of this holy man; for while he loved an infinite number of souls individually, yet for each he had a different degree of love. Perfectly and purely according to the grade of their spiritual attainments did he love them all, but for no two was his love the same. He detected in each the special qualities and characteristics which enabled him in his charity to rank them according to the measure of grace within their souls." Ste Jeanne Françoise de Chantal does not add that, with his keen power of discernment, he, undoubtedly, placed her at the head of this spiritual hierarchy. But I shall refer again to her when we come to his own spiritual life.

Thus was he endowed with every gift; he came of excellent family, was intelligent, saintly, and, most important of all, he possessed that radiant goodness which in some indefinable way is a divine reflection. All these qualities explain why he exerted such an immense influence in his day and generation; they, alone, explain the continuance of that influence down to the present moment. One of the most curious of writers, who will doubtless be astonished to find himself quoted in a work

on St Francis de Sales, M. Jean Cocteau, in "Le Secret professionel" wrote this sentence in reference to authors who discover their talent late in life:

"Certain fortunate works flourish like those seeds found in an excavation in Egypt on the mummy of a young girl, which when sowed a thousand years afterward in Baltimore, produced beautiful roses." But there are fortunate works which never cease flourishing in any season.

The most original aspect of the spiritual advice of St Francis de Sales is that far from requiring for the practice of religion a devotion which stands apart from everyday duties, he disseminated this fervor over all of life, like a refreshing stream of water flowing through a parched garden.

An instance of this is found in the life of Madame de Chantal. Before the Bishop of Geneva became her spiritual advisor, she had been under a priest who encouraged her to practise an extravagant piety. She was living at the castle of the Rabutins with her father-in-law and her children, following the tragic death of her husband, Baron de Chantal. The whole household was disturbed by her exaggerated devotion. For instance, when she arose at five o'clock on winter mornings for her devotions, she would call her maid to light the fire and help her dress. St Francis de Sales taught her to bother no one:

"You must have so sweet and loving a devotion for God," he told her, "and so kind and cheerful a love for

your neighbor that no one will be disturbed or annoyed by your devotions. If you wish to rise early in the morning to seek God in prayer, is it not more sensible for you to rise alone in order the better to find Him, without giving unnecessary trouble to those who serve you?" When, after some difficulty, St Francis de Sales replaced this strange confessor, the castle breathed more freely, as we are assured by the latest biographer of Madame de Chantal, the Abbé Brémond. Henceforth the piety of the baroness was less troublesome to those around her, and her servants did not hesitate to tell her:

"Madame's first director had her pray three times a day, and it annoyed us all; but the Bishop of Geneva has her pray every hour in the day, yet we are not inconvenienced in any way."

Thus by his spiritual advice did St Francis de Sales succeed in imbuing every act of one's life with a deep peace and love. M. Fortunat Strowski in his scholarly study of the correspondence of the Saint, is somewhat scornful of the horde of women for whom he acted as spiritual advisor. He terms them mediocre, commonplace, insignificant. But in the first place, there is, of course, no reference in his published works to his advice to women enslaved by any pitiful or degrading passion. Such things are not, as a rule, put down on paper, and when they are, they are quickly destroyed. We have it on the testimony of Madame de Chantal that he restored calm in families that were profoundly disturbed, and that at a

period when love and hatred were often carried to violent extremes, not infrequently to surrender for the one, bloodshed for the other.

Moreover, it does not seem to me that these penitents of St Francis de Sales were so insignificant. I refer, of course, to his worldly penitents for he did direct great abbesses like Madame de Chantal, and for a time only, not long enough for her, Mother Angelica. Women like Madame de Charmoisy, Madame de la Fléchère, Madame Le Blanc de Mions, were all intelligent women, and even subtle; they were conscientious, perceptive, and they felt they were being tempted. Very likely they were tempted to commit no grievous sins, but they did suffer all those morbid temptations which are the preliminaries to worse.

Most of these women belonged to the nobility of Savoy and lived on their estates in the country, paying occasional visits to the little courts at Annecy, Chambéry, and Turin. Some belonged to the parliamentary artistocracy of Burgundy and Dauphiny, others to Parisian society. But their lives — the details of which have been unearthed as a result of the methodical studies of those provincial scholars whose labors have paved the way for most of the important historical writing so far accomplished — their lives have many points in common, notably in the resemblance between their husbands.

These gentlemen were either magistrates, diplomats, or warriors. Nearly all were gamblers, libertines, wanderers. Only upon rare occasions did they return home; their duties required their presence elsewhere. We are

greatly mistaken, nowadays, when we imagine that our modern means of locomotion have developed a taste for travel. The craze for travelling was, perhaps, as keen in the Middle Ages and in the days of the Renaissance as today. Read the account of mediæval pilgrimages written by Joseph Bedier and Emile Male. Crowds from every province in France composed them. The number of pilgrims to the Holy Places was unbelievable. Those who were bored with life at home doubtless used these journeys as pretexts for getting away.

In this way, the most charming of women were left alone. They had need, then, of great virtue. How many of the penitents of St Francis de Sales were forced to administer vast agricultural estates ! How often they had to make reparation for the thoughtlessness of their husbands and wait patiently for their return !

Although those severely tempted or consumed by passion, worry, or distress may find peace and solace in the Saint's writings, yet neither the "Introduction to a Devout Life" nor the letters were written primarily for them. They are addressed more especially to all those who, in their daily trials, difficulties, and temptations have need of comfort, stimulation, or consolation, or who, perhaps, require an awakening to arouse them from their tepidity, their torpor, their frivolity. On the whole, is it not better so ? Exceptional situations require exceptional solutions. Often every-day life is neglected. Monotony causes commonplace duties to become mechanical with the result that we lose sight of frequent opportunities of seeking interior perfection. Down through

the centuries the "Introduction to a Devout Life" has wrought wonders in the hearts of men because it is woven of the precious fabric of their thoughts and daily desires. It is easy to infer from the "Introduction" that the Saint aimed at checking the imagination which, in the solitude and boredom of country life, succeeds in corrupting or rather, in alienating from God, the affections of a heart weary of struggle.

Worry, although not sinful, is, nevertheless, "the greatest misfortune that may come to a soul, sin excepted." Does it not proceed from "an uncontrolled desire to be delivered from some present evil or to acquire some coveted good ?" It complicates the situation as unmistakably as the movements of a bird, trapped in a snare, make all the more sure its captivity. We should avoid worry, and likewise discontent, which, "like a severe winter strips the earth of all its beauty and enervates the animals, for it deprives the soul of peace and happiness, rendering every faculty powerless." Let us beware, too, of all false desires "for objects that we can never possess. They divert our mind from present duties which, though trivial and insignificant, may merit for us a great reward." As Bossuet was later to say: "The greatest mental disorder consists in believing in the existence of certain things merely because we wish that it were so."

The women who were instrumental in giving us the magnificent counsels of St Francis de Sales were not insignificant. I should like to bring some of our modern women into closer touch with them.

CHAPTER II

MADAME DE CHARMOISY

THE first of these feminine followers of St Francis de Sales, who tried to lead devout lives while living in the world, was Madame de Charmoisy; it was to her that the first letters, eventually included in the "Introduction to a Devout Life," were written. Her maiden name was Louise du Châtel; a Norman by birth, brought up at Court where she was lady of honor to the Duchess de Guise, she had married Claude de Charmoisy, a relative of the Bishop of Geneva who filled various diplomatic roles. It was a love match. Despite the strictness and formality of her up-bringing as a young girl, she was impulsive and affectionate, as may be seen from the only letter to her fiancé that has been published:

"My love," she writes, "will remain eternally yours until death," and she goes on to say: "I would rather lose my immortal soul than become unfaithful to the love I have so fervently pledged to you." The salvation of one's soul and remaining faithful are not, however, necessarily incompatible. This letter, moreover, is the least affectionate of all her letters. There are nine others in existence, written undoubtedly in secret, which reveal most interestingly the inner reactions of a young girl

living at the end of the sixteenth century.[1] Jules Vuy, the excellent biographer of Madame de Charmoisy, was frightened at the intensity of feeling expressed in these letters, and hesitated to publish them. When they fall in love, the most sedate of people often show themselves to be also the most daring.

Their marriage took place in Paris, in June 1600. We do not know when either husband or wife was born. M. de Charmoisy must have been a little over thirty at this time, for he was a contemporary of St Francis de Sales, who was then thirty-three years of age. And his wife was but thirteen if we are to accept as true her statement when she testified at the inquiry which preceded the canonization of the Bishop of Geneva, for there she said that she was "approximately forty-five years old." But the word "approximately" leaves a certain latitude; if the discrepancy was as much as five or six years, she may have been seventeen or eighteen when she was married. "Approximately!" Even the truly devout succeed but slowly in their striving for detachment from temporal values!

Immediately after the wedding, M. de Charmoisy brought his wife to Savoy. Without doubt, she established many pleasant contacts with these excellent Savoy nobles, still so simple and unaffected. Annecy was not without the polite charms of good society. Living there at about the same period were President Favre, St Francis de Sales, Msgr Fenouillet, not yet bishop of Montpelier, the poet Marc-Claude de Buttet, and Honoré

[1] These nine letters, as well as twelve written by M. de Charmoisy have been given by a descendant of Jules Vuy to M. Olivier Costa Beauregard who intends to have them published.

d'Urfé, the author of "Astrea." In that little corner of Savoy were elaborated both the first elements of law-making and the glorious beginning of the French language, the language of the greatest literary century in French history.

One should not forget that it was here that St Francis de Sales and President Favre organized the Florimontane Academy. This illustrious body chose for its emblem an orange-tree loaded with flowers and fruit, with this motto selected by our Saint: *Flores Fructusque perennes* [Flowers and fruit eternal]. It had forty members at this time, and was presided over by a president, a censor, and a secretary. This last-mentioned personage, besides being "well-versed in *belle-lettres,*" was expected to have "a keen and alert mind, clear and precise ideas, and noble thoughts." The opening address was made by the Bishop of Geneva and was doubtless characterized by its charm and polish. This splendid society did not last; it died with its first president. Today it is impossible to discover even the names of its forty members. As M. Maurice Barrès once said in the Chamber of Deputies, it is easier to wear the crown of immortality in life than after death.

It is to be hoped that Madame de Charmoisy derived some pleasure from her associations with the future Academicians, otherwise we should have to despair of the charm of *belles-lettres.* But marriage wrought rather abrupt changes in her existence. After the exciting round of pleasures at Court she found herself, except for two or three months at Annecy, living a montonous

country life, burdened with a multiplicity of petty cares, domestic worries, exterior duties, not to mention the appalling solitude of her new existence. M. de Charmoisy was often away, leaving his wife with no one to lean on, and with no distractions. A son was born to them at Marclaz in 1601, then a daughter in 1604; but children meant only one more worry to her.

A friend of the family, M. de la Bretionnière, while passing through Savoy, paid a visit to Madame de Charmoisy who was then residing at the Chateau de Folliet in the wild valley of the Fier. It was autumn, and nature was donning her most sombre attire. She did not conceal her chagrin from him, and he felt obliged to warn her husband. "I have been to see your wife at Folliet," he wrote. "She is most unhappy. I greatly fear that she will be afflicted with a melancholy that will not yield to any mild cure. The place is barren and desolate."

The contrast between Paris and the valley of the Fier, between Court life and solitude, was overwhelming. That she should be bored was inevitable. When M. de Charmoisy would take her with him to Paris on his trips, she was overjoyed to take up once more the Court life she had been obliged to forego. Her life, in short, was not balanced. She adapted herself much better to her husband than she did to marriage, and at times would fall into an enervating torpor, then suddenly would launch forth enthusiastically into a round of exciting gaiety. Tossed, thus, between depths of woe and heights of joy, she might have passed her entire life in this inharmonious condition. She might have contented her-

self with half measures, accepting her lot in life without drawing the full measure of spiritual profit from it. Like many another woman, she would have been only half-happy, half-occupied, and half-generous in her service of her Creator. But she had the exceptional good fortune to meet St Francis de Sales. His wise and kindly advice revivified and strengthened her feeble, wavering spirit.

It is known that Madame de Charmoisy returned to the Bishop of Geneva the letters he had sent her when he came to draw up his treatise on a "Devout Life." A few others that he wrote to her are scattered throughout his correspondence. In one of the last of these he takes up with her the unseemly conduct of her son. As her husband died while she was still quite young, Madame de Charmoisy had to shoulder the heavy responsibilities of educating her children and administering a large estate, tasks to which she devoted herself strenuously. Her son Henri was a continual source of worry to her. In vain did St Francis de Sales and President Favre, in memory of their friend Charmoisy, try to assist her in reforming him. She could do nothing with him.

I advise mothers who are too sentimental, too fearful of hurting or shocking their little ones, to read her correspondence with her son, or so much of it as is still extant. She scolds him unceasingly and harshly, too, but always with his best interests at heart. Yet she spared no pains to educate him well. In order to develop his mind and polish his manners, she planned a trip to Paris, but only on condition that he reform, for "sending a fool to Paris only makes a mockery of us." In those days to be

considered genteel a man had to be cultured as well: today many a fool passes for genteel. She urged him never to waste time, and to organize his day so that he would derive some profit from every hour of it; she tried to get him to take physical exercise, to study mathematics, to pay calls on worth while people. "But you must not forget Latin. Also you should have some good history, a conveniently sized one, near at hand to read often. Frequently discuss what you have learned with your friends." This is, unquestionably, one of the best ways to develop conversational powers. She even kept a good riding horse at Marclaz so that when he came home she would know whether he had learned to ride.

She was interested in his physical as well as his moral development, and frankly tells him that she is worried lest he become knock-kneed, "for there is nothing so unpleasant in this world, nothing so deserving of scorn, as a knock-kneed gentleman." When she learned from a report sent by his teacher that he was untidy in his appearance, she reproved him sharply: "I have been informed that you usually go about sloppily attired. Not only is this unbecoming in a gentleman, but if you continue to appear so coarse and unpresentable, you will find that people will shun your company. Goodness knows that you have a perfect example of neatness in attire before your eyes; His Highness the Prince is never dirty or carelessly dressed. You do not even seem to be able to follow an example that you have constantly before you."

Madame de Charmoisy herself had renounced the

world; but she wished her son to appear in it to advantage. Did not St Francis de Sales insist that exterior neatness is somewhat indicative of a well-ordered interior ? And what excellent advice he gave to young de Chantal when he was about to set out for Court, warning him to avoid little love-affairs, to shun gambling, the diversion of loafers, to refuse to pamper his ease-loving body, and whatever happened not to lose courage ! Most of us have at one time or another read that fine letter of his beginning with these words: "Sir, at last, you are about to set sail on the high seas of this world."

Madame de Charmoisy, as one would expect of a pupil of St Francis de Sales, echoes his sentiments fairly closely, but she did not have the gift of persuasion that he possessed to so high a degree. Her expressions are dull, sharp, and devoid of affection or sympathy. Unceasingly, she urged her son not to waste time. In Turin, he is directed to avoid women; had he not promised her that he would do so ? "Then who is this flower-girl in Chambéry to whom he thinks he is going to remain faithful ? She wanted to hear no more of these silly stories." But the silly stories were repeated all too frequently, each more disgraceful than the last.

Yet although the tone of these letters is in the main largely energetic, they grow affectionate when she evokes the memory of M. de Charmoisy. Then she conjures her son to imitate his father, and to seek to make himself like him. Upon these occasions her emotion gets the best of her and she addresses him "my dear child" instead of using the brief "my son" with which her letters usually

begin. And how easy it is to sense the maternal affection behind a sentence like this: "I shall always be well when I know that you are in good health, that you are leading a virtuous life." This is not the place for sentimentality, and one has too much respect for intimate sentiments to drag them in the mire of vulgar curiosity as is often done today. It is fitting, therefore, to leave much unsaid. There is further evidence of the deep affection of Madame de Charmoisy for her husband in other letters in which she protects her husband's memory, not with florid phrases but by merely stating facts; but her manner of stating these facts has a warmth and eloquence of its own.

Young Charmoisy was unworthy of such a mother. He began his career by marrying Mademoiselle de la Faverge against his mother's wishes. In a letter to her son-in-law, M. de Ballon, Madame de Charmoisy thus describes her daughter-in-law: "I must say one more thing, and that is that when you have seen this woman in Thonon, you will have a stronger proof of my son's lack of taste and good judgment. I assure you that it is no exaggeration to call her ugly; and from looking at her no one would dream that she was less than thirty-five years old. She claims to be a good housewife and to be well born; her speech is uncouth and stilted."

Her attitude is more that of the conventional mother-in-law, than of a mother who follows the precepts of St Francis de Sales. But let us not judge her too severely for this first outburst. She was a fiery and imperious lady, and in those days parents were not accustomed to

have their authority questioned. It is the function of religion to improve and correct our natural instincts. Madame de Charmoisy, who at first refused to receive her daughter-in-law, finally did so in order to make her Easter duty. The following year when her grandson was born, she agreed to act as his godmother.

Having married a woman older than himself Henri de Charmoisy was anxious to free himself from his mother's guardianship. One day at Marclaz when she was examining the books and records pertaining to the management of the estate, he broke into the room and seized records, inventories, and other documents. She was obliged to bring suit against him to force him to surrender them, but the affair was finally settled by arbitration. On the fourteenth of November, 1632, after the case had caused a good deal of scandal, the judges announced their decision. Not only did Henri de Charmoisy admit his guilt, but he thanked his mother for all her liberality, and expressed the hope that, in the future, she would continue to bestow upon him her love and tender affection. Thus was the integrity with which she had administered the estate attested. She had not been content to preserve the estate in the condition in which she had found it but had increased its value, travelling constantly across Savoy to visit her various holdings and to see that they were in good condition.

Madame de Charmoisy found her daughter, Françoise, more of a comfort. Strangely enough, this daughter was the occasion of a rivalry between Madame de Chantal and herself. Mademoiselle de Charmoisy was very much

sought after because of her grace, her beauty, and that air of perfect self-possession which is so rare today. She was, indeed, the masterpiece of her mother's art in developing character and every sweet, womanly virtue. Foremost among all of Mademoiselle de Charmoisy's suitors was M. de Ballon, a wealthy gentleman of very fine connections. Madame de Chantal was also anxious that he should marry her daughter. She had even told the Bishop of Geneva of her plans. He assured her that he would endeavor to renew the negotiations which had already been started, provided, however, that M. de Ballon did not marry Mademoiselle de Charmoisy, whom he, like many others, was courting. In the end, M. de Ballon did marry Mademoiselle de Charmoisy, and Françoise de Chantal, with the approval of her mother, accepted the proposal of M. de Toulongeon, a gentleman some fifteen years older than she. The "some" fifteen years difference in their ages turned out eventually to be twenty-seven.

It is said that the rivalry between two mothers intent upon marrying off their daughters knows no bounds. Yet Madame de Chantal was too noble a soul to resort to a wretched egotism. She continued to bestow her bracing friendship upon Madame de Charmoisy, and the latter assisted her in the foundation of the Order of the Visitation at Thonon.

Little by little, Madame de Charmoisy withdrew from the world. She never thought, however, of taking the veil, for St Francis de Sales had taught her that God can be served anywhere. She spent the greater part of

her time at the Chateau de Villy on the shore of the Arve, an estate which she had reserved for herself. In 1634, she turned over to her son another portion of her estate. She gave alms generously, and by giving something of herself with them, made them still more welcome.

She died at Villy on the first of June, 1645; there is no official record of this date, but it was found entered in the account book of one of her tenants. In her will, drawn up with characteristic neatness and precision, she bequeathed small amounts of money to pious works but stipulated that this money was to be the proceeds of some of her investments. Although she had not forgotten her son's unjust claims, yet she made him her sole heir. Her last act, therefore, bore witness to her generosity and to the scrupulous care with which she administered the estate.

Surely, it is not a useless waste of time to point out the competence and firmness of a woman like Madame de Charmoisy, who labored with untiring energy to cultivate the inner life according to the splendid teachings of St Francis de Sales.

In my youth I knew an aristocratic old lady whom I like to think was like Madame de Charmoisy. She owned five or six chateaux scattered throughout Savoy, and at the proper season of the year she would drive to each in her coach, to the mountains in the summer, in autumn to the vineyards, and the winters she would spend near some city. Never could she be persuaded to travel by rail; she preferred long roads and good horses.

One day, the carriage in which she was riding was overturned in a ditch. The other members of the party became quite excited, but when she saw that there was nothing to be done, she continued saying the rosary she had begun. She was on intimate terms with her tenants, who adored her, despite the fact that she would reprimand them severely and bully them into going to church. When she spoke of God, a rosy color suffused her withered cheeks — where it came from was a mystery for she was so thin and pale that her skin seemed almost transparent. That glow revealed a depth of feeling which she always took pains to conceal, for she despised alike familiarity and weakness.

CHAPTER III

MADAME DE LA FLECHERE

TO GATHER precise and copious details about the various correspondents of St Francis de Sales is no easy task, but in the case of Madame de la Fléchère fortune favors the work, for an old volume by Mother de Chaugy entitled "Life of Five Nuns of the Order of the Visitation," published at Annecy in 1660, gives a detailed account of her life because of the fact that she desired to take the vows of the order on her death-bed.

Madeleine de la Forest was, even as a child, very conscientious. Once, having stolen some grapes without her mother's permission, she suffered deeply from a remorse quite unusual in one of her age. Her education was very thorough, as was not uncommonly the case in those days. We are mistaken when we think that it is only in recent times that women have had the opportunity to become well educated. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women were highly cultured.

Madeleine de la Forest, who was keen and quick, spoke Latin, Italian, and Spanish, "besides her mother-tongue which she knew to perfection." She was reserved in gatherings when gentlemen were present. "All one had to say was: 'Here is Mademoiselle Madeleine,' and they

became at once restrained and respectful." She was a cousin of St Francis de Sales and of M. de Charmoisy. When still very young, she married Claude-François de la Fléchère, a gentleman in waiting upon the Princess of Savoy. Naturally "a little too quick-tempered and impulsive," she must have fallen in love with this fascinating nobleman, who spent most of his time in a round of feasts and gaieties at the Court of Turin. After his marriage, he deliberately risked his fortune and his life in gambling and in dueling, and was neglectful alike of his estate and his wife. Consequently Madeleine found marriage a severe trial.

"She had to live with her aged and extremely irritable father-in-law and in general found the atmosphere of the household not at all conducive to the worship of God. Her husband's fickle moods and spend-thrift habits were a second cross she had to bear. After the example of the wise Abigail, she remonstrated with him so sweetly, lovingly, and discreetly, that she completely won him from his passion for gambling which hitherto had made him lose both rest and food to the detriment of his health, his conscience, and his business affairs. . . Under her gentle guidance he became a mirror of devotion and piety." In those days the most debauched of gentlemen would sometimes reform, and adhere as impetuously to virtue as they had previously to vice, like a cavalier who turns his horse about at full gallop.

Mother de Chaugy refers to Madame de la Fléchère "the pearl of widows," declaring that, Madame de Chantal excepted, she never knew a stronger-willed woman,

nor one more even-tempered, reasonable, and humble. In the first years of her widowhood Madame de la Fléchère busied herself with all kinds of charitable works, endeavoring to reclaim wayward girls, instructing the ignorant, especially in Christian Doctrine, nursing the poor and the sick. "She served the sick in person, dressing their cancers and ulcers with her own hands." She wished to be buried in the Convent of the Order of the Visitation at Rumilly, which she had founded, and in the garb of the nuns of that order.

Her strength of will, which Mother de Chaugy admired so, was largely the result of the spiritual direction of St Francis de Sales. For throughout the correspondence between the Saint and Madame de la Fléchère, one can see that she was not only threatened with, but in actual danger of succumbing to that malady which has become so popular in our day, neurasthenia. One might remark in passing that this disease was diagnosed very exactly by St John Chrysostom in the fourth century. The only difference is that he called it "athumia," which means "the demon of sadness."

If Greek was still generally understood, many a sophisticated fop would languidly assure us that he was suffering from athumia. Athumia slowly gnaws into the soul, despoiling it of every laudable desire and lessening its power to resist temptation. It substitutes imaginary evils for real ones, or in some cases, distorts petty annoyances until they assume the proportions of great sufferings. The least vexation means a friend lost. And the almost insurmountable obstacle to a cure is the pleasure

the sufferer derives from her distress. She experiences a sort of glorified exaltation in her listlessness and exhaustion, in her freedom from the very possibility of effort. At the bottom of this abyss is solid ground where rest and peace may be secured but only on condition that the victim relinquishes any hope of climbing out again. When one is fond of one's affliction, one is not likely to seek to recover from it. Shrewdly perceiving this fact, St John Chrysostom thus forcefully analyzed this mental aberration:

"God put sadness into the heart of man not to make life unbearable, nor to work havoc and ruin, but solely to serve a good purpose. But what service can sadness render ? We should be sad, not when we suffer, but when we do wrong. Unfortunately, the order has been reversed; when we sin, we banish sadness; suffering, on the other hand, plunges us into such profound melancholy that we lose even the desire to live."

What bald advice this is, not to be sad when we suffer ! Yet on second thought, what an excellent defence against our afflictions, for in the end sadness creates new afflictions to torment us. It is all the more dangerous because in the end we come to humor it, to fall back upon it, even.

In speaking of the tragic melancholy of Chateaubriand, Jules Lemaître also points out the utter hopelessness of cases in which the afflicted person finds joy in parading his woes. "Some men," St John Chrysostom remarks, "love to prick and scratch their wounds."

Madame de la Fléchère, however, was not so seriously

afflicted as this. The most remarkable characteristic of the spiritual direction of St Francis de Sales is that he somehow unearthed, cared for and cured maladies of the soul before they had become malignant, that is to say, while there was yet time. He saw beforehand where and how he must intervene. Madame de la Fléchère was constantly disturbed about trifles. But life, after all, is made up largely of such trifles. One cannot escape them, but they may be kept in their place, and not permitted to monopolize too great a share of one's thoughts and desires.

"You must proceed through life," our Saint explains to her, "utilizing the variety of petty happenings of each day so that they may bring you closer to your Lord and Saviour. In this manner, He will lead you by His grace to the unchanging state of a blessed eternity."

"To proceed through life utilizing the variety of petty happenings" — how sweetly this is expressed! How perfectly it answers every objection of ours to the monotonous in daily life! If, instead of complaining about trifles, one were to do something with them, how much irritability avoided and time saved!

Madame de la Fléchère was too introspective. He was constantly warning her against that bad habit; he advised her to simplify her life, and not to keep going over things in her own mind at such great length. Since she knew that she wanted to do what was right, and since she had faith in God, he told her not to worry about anything else and to avoid being always keyed up. Too many scruples paralyze one; she should proceed in good

faith, with a great love in her heart, and "with fewer airs." In concluding he uses almost the exact words of St John Chrysostom. "Do not," he says, "prick your dear conscience any more." The words, "Your dear conscience" show well enough that he realized that Madame de la Fléchère was fond of these scruples of hers, and took pleasure in them; that while she did not like to be tormented by them, she yet felt that this very torture showed her to be an unusually sensitive and delicate soul. Further on he returns again to this: "You should not amuse yourself seeking the cause of your coldness and lack of enthusiasm at prayer, for you will never find it; it is enough to humiliate yourself deeply." He devoted almost more time to these petty inner struggles of hers than he did to the real sorrows she endured. So perfectly had he mastered the art of giving consolation that when she had lost a very dear sister, he reminded her to accept her trial as coming from a loving Father, but he did not insist harshly.

"We cannot," he wrote, "prevent ourselves from thinking in terms of this world, and from regretting the loss of those who were our most cherished companions here below; we must not nullify, however, the solemn profession we made to unite our will inseparably to that of our God." Such women as she are better able than most to face real grief. I would not go so far as to say that they are relieved at last to find some object that justifies their habitual sorrow and gloom, but at any rate, since there is more justification for it, their expendi-

ture of grief at such a time becomes more normal and they themselves are better balanced.

When Madame de la Fléchère's husband died, she was not content merely to weep, she had to unearth something really extraordinary about his death, and finally came to the conclusion that he had been poisoned. St Francis de Sales endeavored to dissuade her from torturing herself on this score. He was finally able to convince her of her mistake, and restored her peace of mind. And although he usually confined himself entirely to spiritual matters, in this case he did not hesitate to give her good practical advice, urging her to straighten out her finances and to sell her old horses which were a needless expense.

As for herself, she should remain calm, peaceful; she found it too easy to get herself worked up. She should strive to achieve a sense of detachment, even from herself. "Blessed are the poor," he reminds her, "the meek and the pure of heart." In God alone will she find the peace which she seeks: "Those who truly belong to God will find their hearts' desire wherever they go."

Another danger against which he warns such overconscientious souls is discouragement. No one understood this better than St Francis de Sales. In his youth had he not experienced that most horrible of temptations, despair ? He understood fully how important it is to restore self-confidence and the desire to lead active lives to those unfortunates who keep torturing themselves and questioning their own motives instead of draw-

ing every ounce of spiritual usefulness out of the ordinary events of every-day life. "God loves distraught souls, provided they are humble and do not lose faith," he once assured a nun, for this malady is to be found in convents as elsewhere, and is often aggravated rather than soothed by meditation and contemplation. And in his charmingly picturesque language, he added: "Do not be ashamed of being a little daubed and dusty with faults; it is infinitely better to be dusty than really unclean. Provided only that you be humble, all will be well."

To Mother de Bréchard, Superior in the convent of the Order of the Visitation at Moulins, a woman whose preeminent position made it imperative that she prove a good leader, he spoke even more frankly and emphatically about the necessity of resisting the temptation to become discouraged. "Your distrust in yourself," he wrote, "is good so long as it merely helps strengthen your trust in God; but if ever it leads you to discouragement, worry, depression or melancholy, I conjure you to reject it as the temptation of temptations. Never entertain any mental arguments in behalf of worry or sadness, for this is sure and certain: God permits many difficulties to darken the path of those who serve Him, but never does He let them fall under their burden, if they place their trust in Him. In short, it is of paramount importance that you never allow yourself to think favorably of giving in to the temptation to become discouraged no matter upon what pretext, not even if you feel prompted to do so out of humility."

For humility, when not properly understood, is often an unfortunate influence. Lack of confidence in oneself prevents action, and thus keeps one from making full use of one's life; and St Francis de Sales believed implicitly in making full use of one's life. In this connection one should read the magnificent letter he wrote to his friend, Msgr Camus, Bishop of Belley, who thought himself unworthy of the position he occupied, and sought the advice of the Bishop of Geneva before resigning. How well our Saint understood his state of mind, and how masterfully he lays bare the real motives behind his action! When duty calls, such scruples should be forgotten.

"We waste hours," he writes, "trying to avoid a task that we might easily, very easily, have performed had we applied to it the energy squandered avoiding it. A similar case is that of a man who is considering leaving his wife, and in the meantime does not take the trouble to love her as he should. Therefore throw yourself more intensively into the task before you, since you feel that you have not been performing it as you should. This is much more sensible than giving it up entirely." Let us lift our eyes to the mountains whence help will come. It is often safer to fight than to flee.

His advice might be applied equally well to husbands and wives who weigh and count their mutual wrongs, instead of bending their energies to making life more livable for each other.

Madame de la Fléchère told no one but St Francis de Sales of her scruples, her worries, her spiritual, and emo-

tional sterility. He took her to task gently but unceasingly, and gradually he cured her. So successful was he that in Mother de Chaugy's biography of her she appears a strong and valiant woman.

CHAPTER IV

MADAME LE BLANC DE MIONS

MADAME LE BLANC DE MIONS, whose maiden name was Ennemonde Chausson, was another deeply devout but over-scrupulous lady. Coming from a bourgeois family, she had married Pierre Le Blanc, Surveyor of Taxes and Comptroller for the Province of Dauphiny. He bought an estate near Vienne, had himself raised to the ranks of the nobility and later became president of the Chamber of Accounts. It was not a very happy marriage. Ennemonde's religious ardor was responsible for a certain amount of unpleasantness. She disagreed with her husband on the question of devotion, and also in regard to the private life of that too amiable gentleman. St Francis de Sales became her director, after having preached at Grenoble during Lent. She wished to keep her correspondence with him a secret, so she requested him to write her under the pseudonym, Sister Barbara Marie, the name she used in her relations with the Order of the Visitation. She was intelligent, and built up a salon of her own. She used her influence to get the local parlement to authorize the foundation of a convent of the Order of the Visitation at Grenoble.

She was always in constant need of reassurance, for

she was conscientious almost to the point of its becoming a mania. I have already referred to her perturbance over the fact that she seemed more devout in word than in deed. She plied her unfortunate director with the most singular questions, as, for example, when she asked if it were proper for her who aimed at perfection, to powder her hair according to the style.

"My goodness, yes !" replied the Saint, "powder it all you want. Pheasants preen their feathers. To be sure," he adds somewhat harshly, "for fear that lice may breed in them."

When she asked if, when her daughter was tired out, she might be allowed to sit down during prayers, he told her, as he had previously told Madame de la Fléchère: "Do not allow yourself to become entangled in webs like this." And further on: "You must not be so punctilious, nor bother about trifles of this sort which do not interest Our Lord."

Far better is it to walk in good faith, simply, freely, joyfully, with all the artlessness of children. It is easy to divine to what severe tests these ladies subjected his patience, to what silly details they obliged him to listen. But his patience never wearied. He received all cordially, for he was quick to sense the fact that weak and sensitive characters are easily crushed if they are not handled with understanding and gentleness.

Madame Le Blanc de Mions had to endure the infidelities of her husband; perhaps it was to hold him that she thought of powdering her hair. Should she broach the subject to her husband or put up with it in

silence ? St Francis de Sales advised her to speak frankly and resolutely, but calmly, without passion or violence. Calm force exerts more influence, is keener to detect flaws in an argument, and is infinitely more convincing.

His last letter to Madame Le Blanc de Mions is dated April 22, 1618, just one year before her death. It is exquisitely urbane. The poor woman had showed too much sorrow at the departure of her spiritual director, so he was forced to scold her thus:

"Dear daughter of my heart," he wrote her, "do you know that I have a daughter who wrote me that my going away has given her great sorrow; that, if she did not control herself, she would weep as many tears as the heavens rain drops of water — and similar extravagant expressions ? But she goes even further, for she says that I am not a man but some divinity sent to be loved and admired, and furthermore, she declares that she would even go beyond these words, if she dared.

"What say you, my dear daughter ? Do you not think she errs in speaking thus ? Are not these vain words ? Nothing can excuse them but the love she bears for me, which, although very holy, is expressed in very worldly terms.

"Now, tell her, my dearest daughter, that never must we attribute divinity in any form whatsoever to the puny creatures of this world; and that she shows herself to be really lacking in the elementary principles of restraint and self-control when she even suggests exceeding the praise she has already bestowed. Tell her to avoid extravagance in words even more than in matters of

dress, and that hereafter, her language should be simple and unadorned. But break this to her in such a gentle, friendly, devout fashion that she will take that reprimand in good part. For you know that I am deeply interested in your welfare, that you are dear to my heart, and that I have complete confidence in you."

How gracefully he could take his penitents to task! It was doubtless only because of him that Madame Le Blanc de Mions was able to endure the difficulties of her married life so bravely and so graciously.

CHAPTER V

MARIE AND HELENE LHUILLIER DE FRASVILLE

MARITAL difficulties are often due to the manner in which a marriage is contracted. In his "Introduction to a Devout Life" St Francis de Sales insists that the unconstrained consent of the couple to be married is essential. He advises a young girl to avoid a hasty engagement, to study herself and her suitor, and to allow herself ample time to weigh her decision. Only too often did he see the havoc wrought by premature unions in which innocent young girls were put at the mercy of old, unscrupulous debauchees. The case of the charming sisters, Marie and Hélène Lhuillier de Frasville, is a case in point.

How unbelievably tragic was the outcome of their lives ! One pictures them cheek to cheek, in profile, as they might have been represented by a fashionable English portrait painter. The older sustained the younger on the road to her frightful calvary, and later followed her into the cloister. They were born of noble parents, and at an early age they lost their mother, Anne Brachet, who virtuously scorned the advances of Henri IV. She would doubtless have watched over them resolutely and sagaciously, but their father wanted only to rid himself

of them speedily by marrying them off. Thus at the age of fifteen Marie married Claude de Villeneuve, Master of Petitions and member of the King's Council.

Happening upon a copy of the "Devout Life," she made up her mind to go to Annecy to see the Bishop, but he, who without ever seeing her had allayed her doubts and strengthened her against temptation, came to Paris. She wanted to discuss with him her sister's tragic situation.

Madame de Villeneuve's own career may be summed up briefly. Left a widow at the age of twenty-five, she founded an order called Daughters of the Cross. They modelled their activities upon a suggestion of St Francis de Sales that a group of girls and widows might be formed to devote themselves to the instruction and edification of their neighbor. She died piously in this holy family after having given a shining example of every virtue.

Hélène, the younger sister, who was so lovely looking that even St Francis de Sales alluded to it, had been engaged at the age of thirteen to a very rich gentleman, a member of an illustrious family. The young man's mother insisted upon bringing this young girl to her home until the marriage should be performed. After three years of pleasure and gaiety, they mutually requested that the marriage be abandoned. They had seen too much of each other; intimacy had killed their desire for each other.

Not in the least disconcerted by this rupture, Hélène's father, who was intent upon seeing his children per-

manently settled in life, immediately married her to Thomas Gobelin du Val, Commissary to the King and Master of the Chamber of Accounts in Paris. What happened ? Undoubtedly it was one of those physiological tragedies whose poignant suffering is beyond calculation. For seven years the young girl bore her martyrdom in silence. Then her father got word of the situation. Mad with rage, he submitted the matter to the Sorbonne, and the marriage was annulled.

She was on the verge of becoming engaged again, but was deterred by scruples over the annulling of her marriage. It was at this juncture that her sister, Madame de Villeneuve, brought the affair to the attention of the Bishop of Geneva. He promptly overrode her scruples. But Hélène was not sure she wished to give up her liberty.

Slowly, the call to a cloistered life took possession of her. Again she consulted her director. Now that she was mistress of her own actions, what should she do with her newly acquired liberty ? She was determined to consecrate it to God, but should she enter a convent or remain in the world without marrying ?

"Society in Paris," he wrote her, "and in the rest of France, too, would not let you live in peace in its midst. It would unceasingly put greater pressure upon you to break the resolution you had taken. Furthermore, to promise to hold so steadfastly to your resolve that no power can change or even weaken it is like promising to perform a miracle, particularly in a world where there are so many subtle lawyers and convincing pleaders."

He insisted that she choose between marriage and the convent. But she had a strong aversion to marriage.

"Alas ! When even those who are greatly attracted to marriage and who find therein such happiness, find also that it requires such patience and such mortification that they often deem their burden unbearable, how could you endure it going into it as you do with a prejudice against it ?"

As soon as she had made her decision, he advised her to enter religion. She could do so gradually, as a foundress at first, which would permit her to follow a mitigated rule. Little by little, she could school herself to complete submission. "Time is a gallant gentleman," as a proverb of those most diplomatic of people, the Italians, has it.

When Hélène Lhuillier received this letter from St Francis de Sales, her sister, Madame de Villeneuve was with her. She showed it to her, murmuring sadly: "I can never leave here." Madame de Villeneuve who knew her better than she knew herself and who had always been her confidante, looked attentively at her and answered: "You will never find peace until you do."

Immediately her uncertainty vanished, and she hastened to place herself in Madame de Chantal's hands to begin her novitiate. Convent life gave her peace and even joy, in spite of her grief in leaving her affectionate sister, Madame de Villeneuve.

St Francis de Sales was convinced of the wisdom of his advice to this poor soul whom life treated so harshly. Gently and sweetly did he lead her in the pathway of

perfection. To die to all earthly things is only one part of the holocaust: "the victim must be consumed." The world must be trampled upon; its idols broken. Vanity must be reduced to ashes so that naught remains but the flame of divine love. This is not the work of a day.

Our Saint wrote to M. Lhuillier de Frasville and to Madame de Villeneuve to congratulate them on having given up this little novice who had contributed so much to their happiness. Eighteen months later, when Sister Hélène Angelique took the vows, he wrote once more to encourage her.

Indeed, Sister Hélène Angelique was destined to shed great lustre upon the Order of the Visitation. She was superior of the convent in Paris for fourteen years and founded several others. In the monastery of Chaillot, established by Anne of Austria, she had the privilege of offering shelter and consolation to the unfortunate Henrietta of France. This ill-fated queen was in attendance at her death-bed. To Hélène Lhuillier, St Francis de Sales gave the strength and determination she lacked, indicating to her the way whereon, timid and broken, she dared not walk.

CHAPTER VI

THE COUNTESS DE DALET

WHEN the husband of the Countess de Dalet died, her parents, Gaspard Le Loup, Count de Montépan, and Charlotte de Beaufort-Montboissier, sought to have her live with them and share their luxury and their many social activities. Her mother, according to Madame de Chaugy, was "an imperious and aggressive woman, and very high-handed." She consulted St Francis de Sales, and he very wisely pointed out to her that she was under no obligation to spoil her children and herself by assuming the burdens and responsibilities of her mother's home; that she should assist her mother in so far as it was possible without endangering her own fortune. He went on to point out that since she did not intend to remarry, it might be well for her not to live with her mother, since the latter kept open house, and that living with her she would be subjected to a succession of honorable proposals. There is no better way for two people of conflicting temperaments to get on well together than for them to live apart.

The Countess Le Loup was one of those aggressive women who overpower all those about them. Her love for her daughter was passionate and possessive, and she never felt that it was sufficiently appreciated. St Francis

de Sales wrote to her trying to get her to restrain it. It is easy to imagine him writing a similar letter to Madame de Sévigné in regard to her daughter, Madame de Grignan, had he been her contemporary and her spiritual director.

"Love, of any kind whatsoever," he admonished Countess Le Loup, "except love of God, can be too great. When it is so, it becomes dangerous. It inflames the soul, because as it is a passion, the greatest of all passions, it agitates and troubles the mind; because it is a disturbance, it disrupts the whole balance of our affections. You must not believe, Madame, that the love of mothers for their children is an exception to this. Indeed, maternal love often exceeds the bounds of wisdom and prudence, all the more so because it seems like such a laudable emotion, so beneficent and so easy to excuse because it springs from a mother's unselfish devotion."

Mother-love can degenerate into an unworthy affection, one preoccupied with the things of this world rather than with the development of the spiritual side of the object of one's affections.

He explains this to Madame de Chastel, Mother Superior of the convent at Grenoble:

"Alas! these poor worldly-minded mothers do not consider their offspring as the handiwork of God; they regard them too much as their own flesh and blood. Forgetting that they are children of a Heavenly Father and souls destined for eternity, they plan and scheme to fit them for the service of an earthly kingdom."

To Madame de Chantal, grieving over her son, he

wrote: "The sufferings of childbirth last much longer than mid-wives know." There is a spiritual mother-love, practised by mothers truly devoted to God and by abbesses and superiors of convents.

Madame de Dalet, whose spiritual director St Francis de Sales was, although he never saw her, hesitated between entering a convent, which she really wanted to do, and fulfilling her obligations to her children. She could, of course, confide her children to the care of her mother, Madame Le Loup, who would gladly have assumed this responsibility, above all in view of the fact that the income from their estates was considerable. With his usual caution, the Bishop temporized and urged her to reflect further before making her decision. In any case, he would not allow her to enter the Order of the Visitation until Madame Le Loup had consented to assume full charge of the children. He suggested that she need not foreswear the world, but continue to live in it, arranging her life, however, as she would have done had she been in a convent. True piety is not incompatible with a life in the world. But after much hesitation, Madame de Dalet, unhappy in the world, retired into a convent. St Francis de Sales had not encouraged her to do so. He gave in only when he saw that she unquestionably had a vocation which could be satisfied in no other way, and that by remaining in the world she was likely to stir up strife and disorder in her own family. Never could it be said of him that he lacked balance or restraint. Even the most troublesome cases failed to disturb his poise and unruffled calm.

CHAPTER VII

ELIZABETH ARNAULT DES GOUFFIERS

ELIZABETH ARNAULT DES GOUFFIERS, almost alone among his penitents, failed to succumb to his influence. That, and only that, warrants any reference to her. The story cannot fail to strengthen our admiration for this spiritual advisor who found it so hard to reconcile himself to the fact that he had found a soul in need and had been unable to bring it solace.

This young girl came from one of the most distinguished families in Saintonge. Her mother, Gabrielle de Fédiet, a domineering and despotic woman, attempted to force her daughter to become a nun, and made her enter the convent at the Sisters of the Holy Ghost. She submitted to superior force, but was not resigned to her lot.

After reading the "Introduction to a Devout Life," she wished to go to Annecy to enter the Order of the Visitation. But the Bishop of Geneva, who knew that pressure had been brought to bear on her as to her original vocation, was in no hurry to admit her to the order. We have already seen how firmly he believed that one should neither marry nor enter a convent except of one's own free will. With truly feminine inconsistency, when the Bishop offered her her complete freedom, Elizabeth des

Gouffiers insisted upon becoming a nun. For several years she appeared to be entirely satisfied with her life in the convent although she had never been permitted to pronounce her vows. Never, however, did she lose her uncompromising hatred of submission nor her strong inclination to appear haughty and dignified.

She proved a nuisance at Annecy and in turn was sent to convents of the Order of the Visitation at Lyons, de Moulins, and finally Paris. Everywhere she went she began to stir up trouble for the Order which had received her so kindly and to which formerly she had made considerable gifts. She now began to demand that her gifts should be returned to her, threatening various of her sisters with law-suits, and claiming special honors and privileges in return for her generosity. And in the midst of her recriminations she would keep having outbursts of ardent piety and devotion. She always wanted those about her to be conscious of the fact that she came from an excellent family. She was a tempestuous creature; although she had retired from the world, she still craved the things of the world and yet could not bear the thought of returning to it. "A terrible woman," Madame de Chantal described her. Frail of body and fickle of mind, sly yet bold, docile yet tenacious, obstinate yet endowed with great enthusiasms, she attracted sympathy yet repelled it, and exhausted the patience of all, even of St Francis de Sales, by the incredible demands she would make and intrigues she would hatch. She could not adapt herself to the life of a nun, nor could she tolerate the thought of life outside a convent.

The Bishop once warned her not to engage in law-suits, but to display a great spirit of conciliation. "The money you will thus spend would be sufficient to support you for life. . . He who lives on the sea will die on the sea. I have seldom known of anyone to embark upon a law-suit who did not die before it was over." He advised her not to acquire wealth at the expense of her peace of mind.

But so heedless was she of his advice that at last, weary of her complaints and criticisms, he decided to write her frankly and to tell her exactly what he thought. Why is she so excessively fond of litigation ? Did her Saviour, Jesus Christ, plead His cause even when unjustly accused ? It is not wrong, of course, to seek justice in a civil tribunal, but a true disciple of Christ does not go to court to claim what is due him. "But, the worldly wise may ask, to what straits do you want to reduce me ? Must we let people tread on our toes ? Shall they be permitted to pummel us, to take the very clothes off our backs without remonstrance on our part ? Yes, it is true that I advise just that. And even if it were not my wish, it is the wish of Jesus Christ. Those who live in Babylon do not accept this teaching, but those who live on Calvary practise it."

This, no doubt, would be a difficult precept to follow in the twentieth century. We should not, however, overlook the fact that he was writing to a woman who was enamoured of the religious life, one who had voluntarily renounced the world, whose very profession required detachment from earthly possessions.

"Let worldlings cling to their world. What need have you of their empty trifles ? Two thousand crowns, and even less, should be enough for one who has pledged her life to Christ Crucified. An income of a hundred and fifty or two hundred crowns should seem like fabulous wealth to one who believes in the gospel of poverty." His own personal wants were so few, his charity was so lavish that the management of his estate had been taken from him and he had been allowed only the use of the income from it. Yet in some unaccountable way, his alms exceeded his revenues.

"In short," he went on to say, "we love a cross only when it is of gold, studded with pearls and diamonds. To be heralded as a foundress in a convent, to be treated with kindly consideration and accorded many privileges and exemptions — this is a luxurious and affluent abjection. On these conditions, Lucifer himself would have been content to remain in Heaven. But to live on alms like our Blessed Lord, to depend on the charity of others in time of sickness and affliction, how hard this is ! How much more so to us who have been nobly born ! Human nature quails at this testing of the spirit. It is not easy for us, but the grace of God makes all things possible." Piety should not be marred by self-love nor should it be "pitifully human."

Madame des Gouffiers was obstinate; she would not respond to the advances of either the Bishop or of Madame de Chantal. And the Bishop kept urging her; like the Good Shepherd, he pursued stray sheep even into the thorniest thickets. With what amazing gentle-

ness he apologizes for the sharpness of his reprimand, without, however, retracting the substance of his letter; which he did not regret! He bewails his uncouthness, his mountaineer abruptness, until one who knows how punctilious and courteous he was is tempted to smile.

But, Elizabeth des Gouffiers was not amused; she was highly indignant at the treatment she had received. St Francis de Sales made a final attempt at reconciliation:

"Now, my dear daughter, since a father must spare no efforts to establish and maintain peace in his family, I implore you to reconsider my advice. Say what you will, my dear daughter, but you are unquestionably wrong. A loving child would have found no bitterness in my letter, for, I assure you, it contained only paternal love and confidence. Evidences of rustic abruptness you will encounter, I do admit; but why should you be vexed at that? Would you pluck delicate fruits from mountain trees, and what is more, from so poor a tree as I? Oh! I do not wish to force your decision, but as for me, I have only one desire, namely, to assist you. If I can do nothing else for you, I shall unceasingly plead your cause before the Throne of God by the Holy Masses I shall offer for you."

This gentle remonstrance was unavailing. The Bishop was at last obliged to request Madame de Chantal to take the steps necessary for her to leave the Order of the Visitation, but he was most distressed to have lost her. "This dear daughter trod the path of perfection so eagerly in the beginning and despoiled herself so ardently of earthly satisfactions that I am astonished to see her again

clothed with all the silly vanities she once rejected."

Shortly after leaving the convent she died of typhus fever, contracted while caring for galley slaves. Her charity had to be of a nature to attract attention. During her last illness she became desperately anxious to be taken into the Order of the Visitation. St Francis de Sales never lost his feeling for her despite her fickle temper and aggravating moods.

CHAPTER VIII

A HOST OF PENITENTS

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES had a veritable host of penitents, and it would not be difficult to show what a beneficent influence he had on each of them. Taken collectively, they throw a somewhat new light upon the society they lived in, and show that it was not essentially so different from ours.

Among them, some were happily settled in life, others were not. But even happiness requires safeguarding, for it is easy to lose it if one does not protect it properly. St Francis de Sales complimented Madame de Giez on her good husband: "You are very fortunate to have so Christian a husband as the one God in his kindness has given you, for the yoke of our Saviour which in itself is sweet and mild, becomes doubly so when two bear it together." He counselled her to show her appreciation of this blessing by not subordinating her whole life to youth.

"Let the flowers of your springtime," he wrote, "blossom into a fruitful autumn." Thus would she achieve the golden harmony of dawn blended with evening.

To Madame de Villesains he commended "the humble gentleness you owe to your dear husband." He reminded Madame de Chailliol, who had just been happily mar-

ried, that "devotion renders youth more prudent and lovable, and old age less painful and boring." She must not forget "the mildness and pleasantness that should be carefully cultivated in marriage."

When Marie d'Avise, niece of Madame de la Fléchère, married Jacques de Blonay, who had set his heart on her while she was yet a child and had taken great pleasure in watching her develop into a graceful and winsome maiden, St Francis de Sales mapped out for her a complete program of life: "Be sure to make yourself pleasant and charming wherever you are, but especially when you are at home." He urged that when she gave alms she do so personally and thus to reap the increased reward for her act, to visit the sick in the village, and to do so willingly, to honor her father-in-law, to love her husband tenderly and to make him happy by her sweet and unaffected kindness, to be "patient in bearing with the shortcomings of others, but especially so with members of your own household." For he felt that one's first duty was to make one's home pleasant.

Madame de Veyssilieu was haunted by a fear of death. Sickness and childbirth tortured her mentally even more than physically, and left her exhausted. Her husband and children, whom she loved deeply, were in her eyes living symbols of the cruelty of separation. If one cherishes such a thought persistently, every-day life becomes so saturated with its depressing gloom that normal activities are paralyzed and every vestige of human happiness is destroyed. St Francis de Sales told the young lady that the only way to get herself out of this dangerous frame

of mind was to flee from it. He advised other penitents, more frivolous and forgetful of the end that awaits us all, to meditate upon death; he warned Madame de Veyssilieu to drive the thought from her mind: "Do no read books which mention death, judgment, or hell; for, thanks be to God, you have resolutely determined to live in a truly Christian manner, and have no need, therefore, of being impelled by motives of fear."

She should take more pleasure in the companionship of those she loves best, and from whom she dreads separation, such as her husband and her children, remembering only that one day they will all be reunited, never again to part. Death does not separate; it unites. And death is not a burden to weigh down life. Gloom should be banished. Sadness, if it is not a sin, often leads to it.

To all who opened their hearts to him he offered simple solutions which brought them peace. There is nothing so new about our modern maladies — neurasthenia, nervous disorders, chronic dissatisfaction or unrest; or even that restless agitation which prevents modern women from remaining quietly at home and causes them to dash out anywhere where they can parade their clothes, dazzle someone, or gossip; from fashionable parties to the theatre and from the theatre to a lecture. For hundreds of years there have been such women as these. One has but to thumb the letters of St Francis de Sales to recognize their sixteenth century counterparts and to find their complaints diagnosed. The faith of these ladies became involved in various complications, as the clear water of a spring becomes muddy when stirred up.

Madame de Brulart complained that she was forced to entertain too much. "Then, since it is incumbent upon you to engage in conversation, see to it that it is edifying," advised our Saint. "God is never far from us when we are performing the duties required of us by our station in life. Quite the contrary." St Francis de Sales' first precept was that one perform the duties expected of him. Madame de Brulart had thought that she was making progress on the path towards perfection, only to find that her old temptations were returning, stronger than ever. "Do not worry," admonished St Francis de Sales. "Our enemies can be repulsed but not killed, "for although we can correct and improve our nature, it will remain human, and therefore weak. These shocks which we suffer when we no longer expect them are warnings, and should remind us to be ever on the alert.

When Madame Brulart was pregnant and feeling fatigued, he told her to make her prayers short but intense, to pray only for a few moments, but to do so often. It is always possible to adapt oneself to new conditions. To another woman who was pregnant, he told the story of a Capuchin artist, a second Juggler of Notre Dame, who could not pray while he was painting, but as he painted only religious subjects, his work was a prayer.

"Now, my dear daughter," he concluded, "the child which is being formed in your womb will be a living image of the Divine Majesty. While all your strength and vigor is being consumed in this marvellous work it is only natural that you should be tired and exhausted. You cannot, therefore, follow your usual order of spiritual

exercises as gaily and actively as usual. But bear these sufferings lovingly in consideration of the great honor you will thus give God."

He also advises Madame de Travernay to make her prayers brief, but for quite a different reason: "You must measure the length of your prayers by the number of your duties. Since it has pleased your Saviour to call you to a life where you are continually being called from one thing to another, you must become accustomed to making your prayers so short and so ordinary that you will never be tempted to omit them, except under stress of the greatest necessity." She must have been a somewhat querulous woman, for in another letter he admonishes her, "Be careful not to fall into the habit of complaining about everything; steel yourself to bear suffering without resentment."

And to Madame d'Aiguebelette, who doubtless had heart disease, for she had to spend whole nights in an upright position in order to breathe, he counsels a pious and cheerful acceptance of this cruel affliction: "The harder you find it to breathe, the more you should aspire after God, sighing for Him unceasingly and desiring ever to love Him more fully." Even before Pascal had done so, St Francis de Sales preached the necessity of begging God for the grace to make good use of ill-health. "O God," Pascal had written, "Thou Who strikes this body with death, and in that dread hour, detaches the soul from all that it loved ! O God, Who will sever me, at the last moment of my life, from everything I have cherished and on which I have set my heart !"

Madame de Peyzieu, well advanced in years, had accepted old age ungraciously. St Francis de Sales did not compliment her on her appearance in conventional fashion. "You must become resigned," he wrote, "to the infirmities and sickness which usually accompany the advanced years you have attained. Sweet Lord Jesus, what happiness for a soul dedicated to God to be well exercised in tribulation before leaving this world!" He does not mince his words, but it is because he understands the beauty of old age. What value is old age to us if it does not make us more spiritual, if it does not bring us closer to Eternal Truth, to God? Madame de Peyzieu did not bear her sufferings patiently. Ah! but she must make herself do so, for he knows by experience, he assures her kindly, that "illness makes us sharp and irritable with our neighbor, unless we are very much on our guard." And, when her son died in far off India, where he had been in the service of the King, it is with an admirable combination of paternal authority and filial respect that he beseeches her to bow before the Divine Will. Her son is not so far away from her as she believes. Memory will always keep him near. And it will not be long before she herself will go to join him.

"It would almost seem that those whose lives were truly worthy of remembrance and esteem live on after death, so great is our pleasure in reminiscing about them and describing them to our friends." Then he adds: "While awaiting the hour of your departure, comfort your motherly heart with the thought of the blessed eternity in which your dear son lives, where you soon will

meet him." Instead of writing to him as she had hitherto done, she can speak to God about him. Later on he warns her against that exaggerated form of maternal love which, under pretext of grief, really finds pleasure in giving way to sorrow. This form of complacency, he assures her, degrades the soul.

The imaginary woes of his correspondents strike more terror in the heart of this gentle Saint than their real sorrows which, if properly accepted, bring solace and relief. He frequently reiterates this.

"It is quite enough," he wrote, "to endure the sufferings which God from time to time sees fit to send us, without conjuring up purely imaginary ones." To Madame de Grandmaison, he remarked, "Most of our troubles are more imaginary than real." Rabelais had the same thought when he made Panurge say: "I fear nothing save danger." But he who fears nothing except danger is already a brave man. If we would confine our suffering to real hardships, and would not exaggerate these, how much needless distress we would avoid ! We must learn to look the truth squarely in the face and turn it to some good account. An admirable positivism this, which succeeds in restraining and utilizing sorrow.

As for anguish caused by calumny, defamation of character, misunderstanding, we should train ourselves to rise above such petty evils. Caustic criticism and stinging sarcasm were certainly as piquant then as today, for St Francis de Sales had constantly to refer to them. He himself did not escape his share of them, once he had become prominent, and he was vigorously, even

vindictively attacked, as we have seen, for allowing Philothea to attend balls. But he never allowed such things to upset him, and he attempted to sooth Madame de Chantal, who was indignant at this unfair criticism:

"You must not be so sensitive," he wrote, "in my regard; you must be willing to hear me censured. If I do not deserve it for one reason, I do for another." To others he recommends this same indifference, and even scorn; for the just may allow themselves the luxury of scorning calumny.

"The most efficacious method of meeting calumny is by simulating indifference; by scorning scorn, and by our equanimity showing that we are impervious to attack, especially when we are anonymously satirized. Slander for which no one will accept the responsibility, is patently false and unjustified." Elsewhere he urges Madame de la Croix d'Antherin not to answer her defamers. When virtue and honor are upon a solid foundation, they cannot be harmed.

"The honor of the righteous is protected by God, Who sometimes wills us to suffer patiently, but never will He permit us to be tried beyond our strength." Our reputation is not at the mercy of every idle report. To seek justification from those who have vilified us is time lost. When the Marquis de Lens informed St Francis de Sales that some of his actions were being misconstrued, he merely replied: "Those who analyze and scrutinize my actions, do themselves more harm than me, for they cannot affect my innocence while they stain themselves with the blackest guilt."

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam has said with similar pride but with greater philosophic subtlety: "The man who insults you, only insults his opinion of you, that is to say, himself."

In the "Introduction to a Devout Life," St Francis de Sales points out still more clearly that honor is above reproach.

"The root of renown," he writes, "is goodness and uprightness which, if allowed to flourish within us, will demand its meed of respect." In the chapter on patience, he penetratingly remarks that the hardest abuse to bear is that of our friends:

"To be disparaged or taken to task by someone maliciously inclined toward us is a pleasure to a man of courage; but to be despised, misunderstood, and badly treated by friends or relatives, is a trial indeed." That is, indeed, the worst of ordeals; the others do us honor and are easy to endure; one comes out of them with a certain glory. But it sometimes happens "that two well-meaning men contradict and attack each other because of a mere difference of opinion." Such things happen every day. In the turmoil of public life often the most deadly attacks are not those of one's adversaries.

I HAVE pointed out that St Francis de Sales did not escape calumny. Although he was sought out by so many penitents, many of them of enormous prestige and high rank, the attacks never came from that direction. His prudence and dignity always protected him, in spite of the envious and base eyes that spied on him — as they gen-

erally watch talent, virtue, and success, to disparage it. But he had to undergo the most humiliating trial through the silly nonsense of his suzerain, Henri de Nemours, son of Jacques de Nemours, the flower of the Court of Valois and husband of the celebrated Anne d'Este, Duchess de Guise. An old chronicler tells the story as follows:

"At that time, there came to Chambéry a courtesan who possessed every charm calculated to inspire vice. After a brief sojourn in this place, she went to Annecy where her notorious conduct became common knowledge. Since the scandal was public, St Francis de Sales considered it necessary to preach against this evil-doer in the hope of driving her from his diocese.

"One of the squires of the Duke of Nemours, who for his own private reason had nourished a grudge against the de Sales family for many years, was incensed at the Saint's preaching. Because he loved the courtesan, he plotted a means of avenging her. He conceived the idea of forging a love letter from the prelate to this courtesan in which St Francis de Sales would ask her to name a meeting-place where he might declare his love for her. This scheme was all the easier for him because he had a gift for imitating anyone's handwriting. Several times he had deceived his own friends. Therefore he wrote a letter to this woman in the Bishop's name, wherein, after having expressed his affection for her, he asked her to forgive him for having publicly denounced her conduct, explaining that his duty obliged him to do so; that personally he disliked the course he had to pursue, but that

if he did not set a good example, his parishioners would resent his silence. She must be persuaded that his preaching in no way prevented him from feeling great love for her, which he would gladly reveal to her, if she would kindly accord him a meeting-place during the night, in some spot where he would be at liberty to disclose his real feelings toward her.

"After writing the letter, he took it to the courtesan and read it to her, and then slipped it into his pocket as if he had found it upon her dressing-table where she had carelessly dropped it. Such was the story they had agreed upon. She feigned the greatest annoyance at the indiscretion of the squire, pretending to conceal the motives for her annoyance, so that her friends would think her restraint an additional proof of Francis de Sales' passion for her. She railed at length against the squire, swearing that she would never forgive him."

After that the abominable plot followed its own course. The Duke of Nemours asked the squire if the rumor were true. The latter took him aside and, feigning great surprise and indignation, showed him the famous letter. It was at this point that the Duke's stupidity became apparent. When Francis de Sales was preaching in Paris and his influence at Court had earned him a number of enemies, someone denounced him before Henri IV as wishing to renew the conspiracy of Marshal de Biron. As a result, Henri IV sent for him. After a single glance at the tranquil face of the Saint, he forbade him to defend himself, assuring him that never for a moment had he suspected him. The King knew St Francis de Sales only

as a foreign prelate who might easily have been mixed up in the intrigues of the Nemours. But Henri IV was Henri IV, in other words, a great king who knew men, not at all the weakly, shallow lover that the Thaurauds, to my great surprise, have depicted him as being in their novel, "Ravaillac." Whereas the petty little sovereign of Annecy, who saw the Bishop every day certainly should have known him, instead of tearing up the letter and dismissing his squire with a rebuke, immediately evinced belief in a calumny the clumsiness of which was so evident. How could anyone for an instant suppose that Francis de Sales would thus compromise himself? Even if they had been successful in imitating his handwriting, what had become of his style?

He sent for the Count de Foras, a relative of the Saint, that he might inform him of the affair. The latter, a very hot-headed youth, demanded that the letter be given him for twenty-four hours, swearing that he would return it on the morrow. He hastened to show it to the Bishop who would not fail, he was sure, to furnish material for his defence.

The Bishop took the letter, read it quietly, and handed it back with the remark: "It certainly looks like my writing, but the style is not mine." He would make no further suggestions. When the reputation of others was at stake, he dared to say to the Duke of Nemours: "If it is enough to accuse a person, who, then, will be innocent?" But in his own case he was silent. Why talk? There are two people implicated in the case, the accuser

and the accused. Let him look first at one, then at the other; nothing more should be necessary.

The young Count de Foras was impetuous and stupid. He tore up the letter and challenged the squire. The Bishop prevented the duel. Nemours was furious. At best, he was the only one in all Annecy who believed in the guilt of Francis de Sales; it was perhaps that which enraged him. He realized that to acknowledge his mistake was to admit that he had not only been silly, but had acted dishonorably. Some time later the squire, who had been sent away on a mission, died near Annecy, but before his death, he publicly confessed his sin, begging that his sorrow and repentance be made known to the Duke of Nemours and the Bishop of Geneva. St Francis de Sales had no answer for calumny except silence.

Such attacks from the outside troubled him less than those from within, for the latter require unceasing vigilance. Temptations should not be feared; they afford us practice in the manœuvres of spiritual warfare. "The lilies that grow among briars are whiter than all others; the roses that bloom near waters are more fragrant." The important thing is not to become discouraged; to guard one's peace of mind as one would a precious treasure. It was this peace which he left behind him wherever he went, and in every soul that would confide in him.

"Since love dwells only in peace," he wrote to Madame Favre, "take care at all times to preserve that holy tran-

quillity of heart which I have so often recommended to you." Was not the constant preoccupation of Christ our Blessed Lord voiced in the words he addressed to his disciples on leaving them: "My peace, I give unto you" ?

CHAPTER IX

PEACE IN LOVE

IN EVER-INCREASING numbers they came to him, and to all he listened, without ever a show of impatience. Never was his door closed to them. He loved them, not because they were human beings, but because they had immortal souls which he craved for God; and he wanted to make them love God.

He wanted to see them calm and joyous, at peace with themselves and with this inner peace reflected upon their faces. He was fond of quoting this phrase from the Bible: "Let joy be thy hourly portion; but seek not the satisfaction of sin." But how can this joy subsist in the face of physical and moral infirmities ? It must subsist, and St Francis de Sales is constantly warning his penitents not to neglect their health nor to allow sickness to depress them. "A truly patient man does not complain of his ailments, nor does he seek pity." Complaining weakens the will of the complainant and wearies those about him. Instead of diminishing suffering, it augments it. So strong is our dislike of physical infirmities, that we object to them even in others. Some, it is true, suffer stoically, often largely to call attention to their courage. With his penetrating psychology, St Francis de Sales saw through their artifices. No, we should be

simple and straightforward, admitting that we are suffering but not parading the fact.

For every disease of the soul St Francis de Sales offers a remedy, but always one that is suited to the character and disposition of the individual correspondent. He teaches all Christians to overcome their scruples, stifle their doubts, and conquer their disquietude. He is a bulwark, strengthening them to walk resolutely and fearlessly along the path whereon God has set their feet. Everything has its proper place, even our duties and our thoughts. To some circumstances in life, we must submit.

What St Francis de Sales terms the "passions of sadness," are what he dreads most for his spiritual children. "Evil," he said, "delights in sadness and melancholy." In the women of his period he detected the same morbid tendency to derive pleasure from sorrow and to become disgusted with life in general, that Jules Lemaître describes in his life of Chateaubriand. Like his predecessors, Seneca and Jean Chrysostom, and preparing the way for such writers as Pascal, Bossuet, and Fénelon, St Francis de Sales not only diagnosed the disease but worked out a cure for it. "The only cure for sadness," St John Chrysostom had said, "is not to cherish it." St Francis de Sales in turn defines discontent as "proceeding from an ill-regulated desire to be delivered from a present evil, or to acquire some coveted good; yet there is no better way to aggravate the evil from which one wants to escape or to delay the good one seeks than by indulging

in worry." He knew full well the subtle pleasure some people derive from cherishing their woes. He denounced the danger of permitting the imagination to magnify every petty trouble. A life brimful of activity is the best weapon with which to vanquish this persistent enemy to happiness.

Fénelon later said: "Men who have wasted their energies and talents in the pursuit of every conceivable variety of pleasure deem the consolations of an innocent life insipid; they fall into the dangerous clutches of boredom when they are no longer animated by the fury of their passions." And Benjamin Constant wrote to Madame Récamier: "To love is to suffer, but it is also to live." To live, not peacefully but belligerently, to seduce, to conquer, to satisfy every inordinate craving, such is the formula of the passionate, excitable neurotics who do not think they are living unless they are being shocked or heavily stimulated. They look upon order, balance, health, security, and peace of mind as tame and insipid; each day they must experience some feverish outburst to convince them that the spark of life still flows in their veins. It is dangerous even to be near such people. They are likely to upset the most virtuous of women, for they inculcate the false principle that this mad rush of theirs through life has its poetry and grandeur. They create the illusion that they are powerful, whereas they are only agitated; they distort one's sense of values making regularity of life seem like monotony, and rules of behavior like useless restrictions. They have little diffi-

culty in convincing women that it is not dangerous to play with this fire that imbues them, and that perhaps it would be refreshing to do so.

"It is a grave failing in a woman," wrote the author of the "Introduction," to desire to dabble incessantly in love, even though she may never seriously consider accepting a lover." So quickly is the will enervated that, although she may not be conscious of having given her consent, yet she has in reality done so. But temptations should not alarm us, nor render us crestfallen and dejected. "One can not be of this world," says St Paul, "and not know temptation."

St Francis de Sales threw the bright light of his intellect upon these hidden romances which so often deteriorate into adultery; he drew them from the obscure corners in which they hide like nocturnal birds which cannot endure the light of day, and showed them as they are, sinful and dangerous. He was a physician of souls, fully aware that serious maladies are successfully combated only in their incipient stages. Nothing, however, could discourage him, and he would never admit that a case was hopeless, but the first precautions, although the more difficult to prescribe, seemed to him the most efficacious. Likewise he warns men against "those easy-going she-devils, of whom a man may not rid himself, once he has paid them homage." His spiritual advice tended to make marriage more serene and attractive by means of love, but of an imperturbable love which carried with it the peace of God.

Behind the immense influence of the "Introduction to a Devout Life," and his letters to individual penitents, was a single quality, love.

"In my opinion, there is no one in the world," he wrote to Ste Jeanne de Chantal, "who loves more cordially, tenderly, and I say it in all good faith, more wholeheartedly than I; for thus has it pleased God to constitute me. Nevertheless, I love independent souls, vigorous and sturdy, for weaklings, in their excessive vacillation and timidity, are perpetually perplexed and disquieted. This frame of mind hinders them from developing a loving intercourse with God; to them total resignation to the Holy Will of God is as impossible as the death of self-love. That which is not God is nothing."

But he made everyone discover God for himself. We have already noticed his attitude toward the great ladies of his time. Let us see what he has to say to the most humble of his penitents, a young girl who was a candidate for the position of attendant in the convent of the Order of the Visitation in Paris. It would be her duty to act as portress in the convent, and to run errands. And one should not forget that she was merely an applicant for the position.

"It is a great honor, my dear daughter," he wrote, "to be responsible for the preservation of a household composed of the Spouses of our Blessed Lord; for whoever guards the doors and parlors of our convents, guards the peace, devotion, and tranquillity of the house. Also, she

is in a position to give great edification to those who have occasion to call at the convent. In the service of God nothing is trifling. In my opinion, having charge of the doors is of great importance and eminently useful to all who perform their duties with humility and forethought."

No position seems trifling to him, no person insignificant. Every home becomes sacred if God is invited to enter it. A person who tries to lighten the burdens we all carry through life, however else he may be characterized, cannot be termed effeminate. There is real strength behind his tenderness. He is the Cyrenean who bears the crosses of us all. As he advanced in years the number of men, and especially of women, who appealed to him for guidance and consolation increased, yet never did he turn away those who came to offer him their woes and sorrows. He loved them all.

He died at the age of fifty-five exhausted by this superhuman effort. The heavenly peace which seemed to radiate from him in an almost physical manner, for it did one good just to meet him, proceeded from his inner self, where the flame of Divine Love burned, like the lamp in the sanctuary.

BOOK IV

ST FRANCIS DE SALES AND THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

CHAPTER I

THE LOVE OF GOD

PICTURE for yourself that glorious and never sufficiently praised King, St Louis, as he is about to embark upon a long voyage; picture the Queen, his dear wife, preparing to go with His Majesty. Now, had you asked this good princess:

" 'Madame, where are you going ?' She would doubtless have replied:

" 'I am going with the King.' And had you persisted:

" 'But, do you know, Madame, where the King is going ?' She would have answered:

" 'I have a general idea, but I have no desire to know precisely where he is going. My only desire is to accompany him.' If you had plied your questions further:

" 'Then, Madame, you have absolutely no plans for this journey ?'

" 'No,' she would have responded, 'I have no other ambition beyond that of being with my dear lord and husband.'

" 'Your husband,' you might have rejoined, 'is going to Egypt, and thence to Palestine. He will probably pass through Damietta, Acre, and many other places. Do you not intend to go there, Madame ?' To that she would have replied:

" 'No, really, I have no plans; I desire only to be near my King. All places are alike to me, and I think not of them, unless he be there, for all I crave is his presence. It is the King who is going on this voyage; I am not going, I am following. For the trip itself, I have no desire. My only joy is to be with my lord. The journey, its duration and attendant pleasures are totally immaterial to me.' "

You believe, I am sure, that this beautiful lesson of love and submission in conjugal life is drawn from the "Introduction to a Devout Life," and was written to show Philothea how a wife should subordinate her own interests to those of her husband. Not at all. This is a passage from the "Treatise on the Love of God," and is only one of the numerous similies intended to teach us how to accept the Holy Will of God. The "Treatise on the Love of God," which relatively few have read and fewer still have understood, is one of the most beautiful books in all French literature. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, it struck a new note and released a flood of purest melody. The fearful and tempestuous sixteenth century had so far complacently basked in Rabelais' burlesque epic, the savory criticism of Montaigne, and Ronsard's passionate and voluptuous lyrics. Then came the Bishop of Geneva to call attention to the inner

life. Those who thirsted for a love that is so rarely, and then with such difficulty, satisfied by worldly passions, came, like the stag after a desperate hunt, to quench their thirst in the sparkling water of his writings. The spring whose source is St Francis de Sales is half hidden by shrubs and bushes; noiselessly the water from it slips over moss in the stream bed, but in it is reflected the spotless, unblemished purity of Heaven. The psychological writers of the greatest century in French literature drank deep draughts of this crystal stream.

The author of the "Treatise on the Love of God" did more than to direct attention once more to the analysis of the life of the spirit. He knew that abstract discussions discourage such frail and immature minds as he desired to attract, so he enlivened the style of his works by the lavish use of delightful word pictures and similies. Two centuries later, Chateaubriand was to display a similar wealth of imagery in his "Genius of Christianity." But there is this essential difference. Chateaubriand exercised his artistry with the sheer joy of an expert craftsman while St Francis de Sales, utterly unconscious of his amazing gift, lavished it with prodigious extravagance as an alms to assist every pilgrim journeying toward God.

In the "Introduction to a Devout Life," his indebtedness to Pliny and other classical authors is altogether too obvious; but in the "Treatise of the Love of God" almost all of his similies are taken from nature, whose praises he has sung with unsurpassed poetry. He is also a love poet, and the poet of every-day life, for it is through

every-day life that he introduces us to the mystic life of the soul.

This submission of our will to the Divine Will which St Francis de Sales would impose upon us by love, this trust in Divine Providence which shapes our destinies, has appeared to some commentators to contain the germ of fatalism. How gently and graciously he himself dissipates this misinterpretation !

"The will is the mistress of all our affections," he assures us. "It is like a young lady sought after by many suitors among whom, undoubtedly, is the one of her choice. But, after marriage she is no longer free; the role is reversed; she becomes subject to her master's power, remaining captive to him whom she had captivated. In like manner, the will, after it has selected and embraced its own love, becomes subservient to it. A married woman is subject to her husband as long as he lives, but at his death, she becomes free again until she remarries. So too, while love lasts it dominates the will which yields to it; but, if this love should die, the will in a brief space may embrace another. There is a freedom of the will, however, that is not shared by the married woman. The will may freely renounce its love when it so desires, applying the understanding to motives which can rout the old love. Thus, to make the love of God live and reign in us, we must crush and kill self-love. If we are unable to annihilate it completely, then at least we must weaken it so that it may not obtain the mastery. We can, of course, relinquish Divine Love to accept the feeble, evanescent love of creatures. This is

the infamous adultery which the Heavenly bridegroom so often has reason to bemoan in sinners."

We are at full liberty to change the object of our love, to descend from divine love to profane or to mount from earthly affections to the sublime love of God. But the quality of the will is changed according to the love that it espouses, just as the rank of a woman changes when she marries, becoming noble if her husband is such, Queen if he is King. In like manner, the will varies in quality depending upon the object of its love, whether carnal or spiritual. It is always within our power to rise superior to the lowly things in life. Our will should constantly spur us on to greater holiness. We should cling to its praiseworthy decisions with the tenacity with which we cling to life. But let us see where St Francis de Sales plans to lead us. From conjugal love he drew his first comparison. His second he takes from filial love wherein the troublesome element of human covetousness finds no entrance:

"The daughter of an excellent physician and surgeon was stricken with fever. Knowing her father's great love for her, she told one of her friends:

" 'I am suffering intensely, but I feel no anxiety. I have complete confidence in my father, whose knowledge and love will supply all my needs. In my ignorance I might desire the very things which would be most injurious to me. I am happy when he is near me; I strive to give him every evidence of filial love and confidence.'

"Having said these words, she fell asleep while her father, convinced of the necessity of bleeding her to effect

a cure, prepared to do so. When she awoke, he inquired how she had rested and asked her if she did not want to be bled.

" 'Father,' she replied, 'I am in your hands. I do not know what I should desire in order to regain my health. But, of this I am sure, that you will do for me whatever seems best to you. I am satisfied to carry out your decisions and to love you with my whole heart.'

"Whereupon, he bound her arm, and piercing it with a lancet, severed a vein; but, while he was making the incision and even when the blood spurted, this loving daughter never once looked at the cut on her arm or the blood jutting from it. With her eyes fixed on her father's face, she was silent except occasionally when she murmured very softly:

" 'My father loves me tenderly. I am entirely his.'

"When all was finished, she did not thank him. She merely repeated her words of love and confidence. . .

"Now, tell me, did not this daughter manifest a love, more sincere, heartfelt and complete, than if she had wearied her father with entreaties for remedies ? Did not her loving, trustful words far outweigh any expressions of gratitude she might have proffered ? Most assuredly they did. Had she been wrapped up in her own selfish interests, what would she have gained ? Was not her father in his all-embracing love bent upon giving her every care and attention ?"

This model daughter knows that her father will spare no effort to cure her. She accepts from him, therefore, without letting her mind dwell on its unpleasantness,

the apparent evil for the real good, indeed, an attempt only to attain the real good. All that he does must be good. She would not doubt him even in death. We, too, like the wife sincerely devoted to her husband, or the daughter completely satisfied with her father's will, must abandon ourselves wholeheartedly to God our Father, permitting His will to be accomplished in us, utterly indifferent as to whether He sends us happiness or hardship, joy or sorrow, wealth or poverty. We should receive all with equal tenderness and undisturbed equanimity. To impress us further with the necessity of grasping this principle so vital in our spiritual life, St Francis de Sales next proceeds to set before us the Biblical picture of Job. But how he enlivens it! He renders it worthy of the brush of a Rembrandt.

"There sat the great Job, king of all the outcasts of the world, reigning supreme on his throne of wretchedness, a dung-hill, adorned with ulcers and corruption, regal garments quite befitting the quality of his royal state, and crowned with such great abjection and decay that it was difficult to decide whether Job was a man reduced to dung, or the dung corruption in human form. Now, behold the great Job exclaiming:

" 'If we receive the good things of life at the Hand of God, why should we not also receive those that are distasteful.'

"O God, what immeasurable love! He is convinced that it is from the Hand of God that he had received good things, thereby demonstrating that he has not esteemed them as good because they were such, but because they

emanated from the Hand of the Lord. And, he concludes that adversities should be borne lovingly since they, too, proceed from the same Hand, equally deserving of love when It scatters afflictions as when It distributes consolations. Who does not welcome blessings? But to accept tribulation is the mark of perfect love, which cherishes them solely because of the loving Father Who sends them."

"Corruption in human form!" How many writers have attained such a compact, concise, effective style? Does he not stir up a whole leprous abyss, then render it resplendent, as a ray of sunshine filtering through darkness reveals the fragile beauty of the dimly-traced spider-webs of the great masters? Love which is contented with joy, which craves joy alone, is not worthy of the name of love. Indeed, it risks becoming merely a substitute for pleasure. But a love which accepts joy and sorrow on equal footing, with the same tenderness and even passion — such love has all the distinguishing marks of true love.

"To desire suffering," said Blessed Angela Foligno, "is an indisputable proof of love."

"Try me," cries out the loving soul to God, "prove me. Gladly will I suffer for You because I love You. Since anguish comes from You, my God, how can it wrest from me a complaint? Everything You send is good, lovable, and pleasant. To rebel against pain and suffering, to refuse to press the cross lovingly to my breast is to doubt You. Can I doubt Him Whom I love?"

Love is the great motive behind all our actions. "It

is a fire," says St Francis de Sales, "which has been kindled from fine, delicate material. And the finer the material, the more beautiful, ardent, and vivid are its flames. But they may be extinguished by smothering them with a common substance, earth. In like manner, the more elevated and spiritual is our love, the more ardent, masterful, and permanent are our actions. But love may be completely ruined by degrading it in vile, terrestrial unions." Sinful love engenders worry and suffering. On the other hand, "spiritual love, finding in its union with the object beloved more happiness than it dared hope for, continues day by day to grow and perfect itself."

With the possible exception of Plato, no one has more clearly and forcefully expressed this tendency of man towards spiritual love and ultimately towards God than St Francis de Sales. In the "Banquet" Plato celebrates "beauty, eternal, uncreated, and imperishable, exempt from increase or diminution." He bids Diotime, the stranger from Mantine, say:

"O my friend Socrates, if anything can give value to this life, it is the contemplation of absolute beauty. . . What should we think of a mortal to whom the privilege was given to contemplate true beauty, divine beauty, pure, simple, unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the perishable vanities of humanity, but divine beauty itself ?"

It is this Vision Beatific, God Himself, that St Francis de Sales entreats us to contemplate. He proposes union with God, consummated on the heights of intelligence

and human tenderness. But to be happy in God, we must make ourselves conform to His will.

"Love," says St John Chrysostom, "either discovers a resemblance between itself and the object of its love, or else it creates one."

And St Francis de Sales commenting on these words, adds: "The example of those we love exerts a sweet and imperceptible empire over us, an authority of which we are utterly unconscious. It impels us either to leave them or to imitate them. If the luring fragrance of a perfume tempts you to enter a shop to gratify your sense of smell by perfuming yourself, you will share your pleasure with others when you scatter the sweet essence. So too, the happiness we experience in our love serves to link us closer to the beloved."

We participate in the Divine nature when we love. Love is theology abridged. The concluding words of the "Treatise on the Love of God" illuminates the path of love: "Man is the most perfect handiwork of the Creator. The mind is the most perfect part of man. Love is the perfection of the mind, and charity, that of love. Love of God is, therefore, the end, the perfection and the supreme excellence of the universe."

How far can the love of God lead us? What can it, or rather, what can it not exact of us? Christ on Calvary, to save men, was despoiled of His garments, His very flesh and blood. From His creatures, therefore, God can claim the supreme gift. Since all has been given to us by God, all can be taken from us. But when Providence, to try us, overwhelms us with woe, is it not

enough to accept Its stern decrees, to refrain from protesting against Its severe rulings ? What more can God demand of us ?

Man, nevertheless, can give more. Eagerly, with outstretched arms he can welcome the Divine Plunderer. Instead of waiting for the sacrifice, he can offer himself. This is the astonishing and miraculous story of St Francis de Sales in his friendship with Ste Jeanne Françoise de Chantal.

To be sure, such a friendship, such a love of God, is not new. Catholic mysticism has long recognized and analyzed it. Let us recall a few illustrious examples, St Jerome and St Paul, St Francis of Assisi and Ste Claire, Ste Theresa and St John. In her testimony, Ste Jeanne Françoise has clearly shown that there is an hierarchy of souls:

"He loved them all," she said of the Bishop of Geneva, "perfectly and purely according to their rank, but not equally." Equality is sheer nonsense; it does not exist. The "God of Opportune Occurrences," as Father Fichet magnificently calls Him, can suddenly people His servant's solitude. It was by virtue of such an opportune occurrence that St Francis de Sales came to found the Order of the Visitation and to write the "Treatise on the Love of God." And Ste Jeanne Françoise de Chantal was indebted to that same meeting for the accomplishment, rigorous and sublime, of her religious destiny.

Their correspondence (That of Madame de Chantal has been largely destroyed, but there remain some few admirable letters) allows us to establish intimate con-

tacts with these two great Saints. But we must approach them with reverent mien, remembering that we are penetrating into a Holy of Holies. So far does their story surpass the common run that in order to attempt to understand it without corrupting or weakening it, we must purify ourselves from all earthly dross.

"Before the enigma of a friendship which imperceptibly divests itself of all semblance of earthly ties or associations," writes the Abbé Brémond in his biography of Ste Jeanne de Chantal, "human intelligence can only be silent in an act of blind faith in the testimony of the saints." The aim of their friendship never ceased to be God; but the transparent veil through which they perceived God was at last destroyed, permitting them to see Him face to face.

CHAPTER II

MADAME DE CHANTAL

BIOGRAPHIES of St Francis de Sales are not wanting. Yet among the large number that exist there is not one really good one, not even Hamon's, which is meagre in detail and cold in treatment. Every one of them has been inspired by the first three written, those by Charles Augustus, nephew of the Saint, Jean de Saint-François and a third by Father de la Rivière. Recent research has unearthed a number of details that allow us to revise the accepted account somewhat. Moreover the fashions in biography have happily changed. It is no longer the style to dehumanize saints by emphasizing how different they were, but, without belittling them, they are now brought closer to us. We take cognizance of their human side before passing on to the consideration of how greatly they surpass us in spiritual achievements.

Affectionately, faithfully, and even picturesquely has Mother de Chaugy depicted Madame de Chantal. Mother de Chaugy's biography was based upon information she received from the Saint herself. Upon this first portrait, Msgr Bougaud, Bishop of Laval, based his great work, elegant and edifying, but one in which Ste Jeanne Françoise appears too uniformly superhuman and ro-

mantic. The Abbé Brémond's more substantial little book, on the other hand, depicts a truly feminine character. Therein the Saint is none the less ardent, to be sure, but it is a feminine ardor, that is to say, an infinite capacity for tenderness, a rebelliousness, well-balanced, vehement and capable of leaping with a bound to attain that supreme gift of the soul to God, love. This vast depth of feeling, man, even when impelled by glowing passion, cannot attain so quickly. But this latter biographer attributes to Ste Jeanne Françoise an influence over St Francis de Sales which, on the contrary, I am inclined to believe he exerted over her. In this holy friendship the roles were not reversed. St Francis de Sales always remained the leader, the director, the final authority, the man.

Relying upon those three biographies, I shall sketch quite briefly the childhood and youth of this Saint before her meeting with St Francis de Sales. Jeanne Frémyot was born of an important Parliamentary family at Dijon, on January 23, 1572, five years after the birth of St Francis de Sales. When slightly more than two years old, she lost her mother. Her merry, sunny ways brightened the grave but not austere Burgundian community in which she lived, a community characterized by fine good sense and stalwart virtue. She developed into a very captivating young girl with beautiful curls the color of a ripening chestnut. A detestable old maid who lived in the castle of Neufchèse where the Saint spent some fifteen or twenty years in her older sister's home, was, according to Father Fichet, bent upon teaching her "how

to gain admiration and arouse love, how to paint and powder and perfume herself with a view to making the most of her charm to captivate men." But the lovely young girl had no need of such lessons. Unconsciously and artlessly, she attracted and won all hearts by her vivacity, her youthful gaiety and a sensitiveness so extreme that tears came to her eyes at the thought of the havoc heretics had wrought upon the churches in Poitou. From her suitors, she selected Baron Rabutin-Chantal.

It was a love match. Every member of the Rabutin race was, moreover, charm itself. It terminated gloriously in the "divine Marquise," Madame de Sévigné. The latter's father, Celse-Bénigne de Chantal, son of Ste Jeanne Françoise, is thus described by Bussy-Rabutin, the author of the scandalous "Love Story of the Gauls":

"He was extremely playful. His every phrase had a happy turn which delighted people. But it was not this alone which made him so fascinating. It was his engaging manner and the winning grace with which he spoke. His every word and gesture radiated joy." Certain people there are who clothe life with a joyous charm, a contagious happiness, ably demonstrating that, despite its queer blending of sun and shade, life is and can be, wholesome, satisfying, beautiful.

Jeanne Frémyot's husband, Christopher, was a splendid specimen of these handsome Rabutins. But the new Baroness de Chantal, fortunate in a marriage crowned by love and peace, was not destined to find pleasure unalloyed in her new home, the chateau de Baubilly. This old chateau badly needed the Frémyot money. With

all her vivacity, Madame de Chantal was a judicious, methodical Burgundian, marvellously administering a complicated estate. She was economical, charitable, and gifted with a genius for keeping servants, difficult enough accomplishment even in those days.

To Mother de Chaugy we are indebted for the interesting account of how Madame de Chantal politely disposed of a would-be lover who rashly presented himself in the absence of her husband. Her dismissal of this importunate suitor was so consummate an act of tact tempered with forbearance and kindliness that it reflects great credit upon the sturdy virtue of the future Saint. This same biography recounts in no uncertain terms her love, sincere, unwavering, faithful, for her gallant husband.

Her marital happiness lasted less than nine years. Baron de Chantal was accidentally killed while hunting by a friend, M. d'Anlezy. He died bravely, forgiving the awkward fellow who had caused his death, consoling his wife whom he left with the burden of four children. So great was Madame de Chantal's grief that Bussy declared it "excessive." Did she become a skeleton as Msgr Bougard states ? Not at all. Health like hers resists the deepest sorrow. She shouldered her cross valiantly, giving no exterior manifestation of her intense grief, but at night she sought solitude in which to bemoan her loss.

To obtain strength and guidance, however, she began her quest for a spiritual director. It ended in securing a despotic and extravagant one who imposed upon her religious practices which upset the whole household. At

this time she was residing at the castle of her father-in-law, Guy de Rabutin. In addition to her own children she was training and caring for a family of five little ones belonging to one of her older servants. Imagine her position. She was accepting with good grace, with staunch virtue and unfailing tact a very difficult situation. Picture her rising early each morning to go some three miles on horseback in order to hear Mass; faithfully acquitting herself of her responsibility towards her children and those of her servant; making life agreeable for all around her and burying in the silence of her own heart any complaint she might have uttered against the hardship of her lot. Even then she was a rare, exceptional woman. Later she was to meet St Francis de Sales, and become a Saint.

He preached during Lent at Dijon. She went to hear his series of sermons and sat directly opposite him, that she might lose none of his words. In a prophetic vision they had both seen each other, and now they recognized each other. He inquired about "the young lady with the light-brown hair" who listened to him with such evident emotion. Later, he met her at the residence of a relative of hers, Msgr de Bourges.

She was at this time thirty-two years old, and without a trace of coquetry. Yet she wore "certain ornaments and dainty finery" that were permitted to ladies of quality after second mourning. He asked her if she desired to remarry. Vehemently she protested against such an idea. He smiled and pronounced the dictum so well-known: "Well, then, lower the ensign."

The next day all her pretty baubles were gone. "Many women will gladly practise secret mortification," wrote an Italian Biographer of Madame de Chantal, "rather than forego the pleasure they derive from wearing some pretty trifle." She still, however, had certain little frills of lace and silk in her widow's crape. He alluded to them, too: "Madame, if those laces were not there, would you lose your peace of mind ?" All this was said courteously, gently, without any apparent insistence or fault-finding. Thus he centred her attention on the life of the spirit. That very evening she ripped the lace off her dress. She meditated, doubtless, as she did so, upon the symbolism of this act.

Some years later, she voluntarily made a still greater sacrifice, one that was not required of her, at least not then. She cut off her hair. Those beautiful golden-brown curls, a different ensign from the ornaments and dainty finery ! "And because she had formerly powdered them, lavished on them a wealth of care and affection, she cast them into the fire." The saint in Jeanne de Chantal is shown in this action. She listened to the call of divine love, pondered it, and then rushed to embrace it. St Francis de Sales expected to find her backward, no doubt, in the things of the spirit. Suddenly she exceeded his expectations.

Analyzing with so much common sense and deep, religious feeling the ardent soul of Ste Chantal, Henri Brémond concludes that St Francis de Sales misjudged her attitude toward these trinkets. "He did not yet know her," he writes. "Now, most assuredly, those trifles to

her were a mere nothing. She wore them simply because everybody else did so. The only vanity her heart clung to was in my estimation, her hair. This she sacrificed without his requesting it. There is something piquant in discovering a flaw in his usual keen, shrewd penetration. As for a second marriage, the young widow was more than decided on that point. The joke about the ensign, I think, must have made her suffer somewhat even though she smiled."

Quite the contrary, I believe that St Francis de Sales understood her perfectly. He neither made her suffer, nor smile. He made her think. The proof is that she resolved, later on, to sacrifice her beautiful hair. A woman dresses not to please men alone, but also, and perhaps more often, to annoy other women. Then too, a Madame de Chantal should not "do as everybody else does." Even in the midst of every allurement that life can offer she should set an example. Did she in any other way show detachment from the world or manifest hostility to its spirit ? Her family, evidently, did not consider her as lost to the world because two or three years after this episode they urged and encouraged her to marry again. The gentleman in question was quite mature, distinguished, an influential member of the nobility and a personal friend of her father's. Like many mature men, he was exceedingly amiable. Now, so little had she discouraged his advances that he thought, and he was by no means dull, that some day she would give in. Her father shared that hope. Madame de Chantal was not entirely averse to it. In the heart of a

woman, particularly one who is ardent and tender, many feelings pass even though they may not remain. Was her sacrifice not sufficiently great without our endeavoring to minimize it ? Which of us lightly renounces anything. In renunciation there is suffering that savors of death.

Love has its own peculiar charms when one is middle-aged. It may lack the enchantment, the buoyancy of youth, but it has the sweetness of kindred tastes, sympathetic understanding, and a forbearance, often more kindly, delicate, and capable than youth ever dreams of.

"This devout widow feared that her poor heart would be torn to shreds in the fierce struggle," is Mother de Chaugy's terse comment. And the Bishop of Geneva when he was informed, wrote to Madame de Chantal: "This affair may have flattered your vanity; you may have taken pleasure therein. . . But that is of no importance. You must not attract customers since you cannot offer the merchandise they desire. Tell them definitely that they must seek their wares elsewhere." If, in the "Introduction to a Devout Life" and in his correspondence, he demonstrates his prodigality of attention towards widows, it is because he senses their great need of help. Even the most spiritually-minded among them may be deeply rooted in the things of earth.

Brusque rapidity of decision was an outstanding characteristic in Madame de Chantal. She was asked to cut off her lace; she cut off her hair. That she might never be tempted to marry again, one evening she

branded the name of Jesus over her heart with a red-hot iron.

A Spanish legend relates that in his youth a brilliant cavalier, Raymond Lulle, was madly in love with an exquisitely beautiful and illustrious young lady named Ambrosia. His passion for her was so great that he would brook no obstacles. "I am only a little rose-tinted clay," she objected, hoping to drive him away gently. But he pursued her relentlessly. At last, weary of the endless warfare, she received him one day at her home. There, unfastening her dress, she showed him an ugly cancer which was eating away her breast. "Behold the earthly beauty," she chided him, "for which you are deserting God, Who alone is Beauty." And Raymond Lulle fled. He never saw her again. Thereafter he pursued God.

There is also the story of the Marquis of Lombay, Duke of Gandia, who fell in love with the wife of Charles V, the charming Empress Isabella of Portugal whose beauty has been preserved for us on Titian's canvas. After her death at Toledo, her body was transported to Granada for burial. The journey took fifteen days. The Duke of Gandia, who had solicited the favor of accompanying the remains, requested one last glance at his beautiful sovereign. The decomposed face had shed its miraculous splendor. Thus did the Duke of Gandia learn the vanity of all earthly affections. Her name, today, is forgotten, but he is remembered as St Francis Borgia.

Madame de Chantal, young, energetic, enthusiastic,

felt the need of definite and permanent protection; so she dedicated herself to God. St Francis de Sales deemed her backward in things spiritual, but she surprised him. In the path they pursued to attain God, he was the guide. But he walked with a measured step, which at times seemed almost monotonous and indifferent, for he was intent upon finding a passage through the rocks and carving out a footing in the ice, content to stop only when the goal was reached. Now, the traveller whom he led was quite different. She was agile, vigorous, buoyant, and afire with a flaming eagerness. She would dash forward, then halt; her heart would beat wildly and her eyes glisten as she contemplated the landscape about her covered with immaculate snow. But did she not have the worry of keeping to the path; she had confidence in her guide, and followed him, even when she appeared to be preceding him

The Abbé Brémond, therefore, believes that he perceives Madame de Chantal on the mountain top while St Francis de Sales is still "in the valley." Perhaps she is there, but if so it is because he is following quietly and pointing the path out to her. He did not walk in her footsteps, as her biographer would lead us to suppose. But the guide smiled with pleasure to have met a traveller, so sure-footed, so eager.

CHAPTER III

THE GLORY OF THE WORLD FADES AWAY

AFTER she had disposed of her cumbersome and opinionated spiritual director, Madame de Chantal committed her spiritual welfare to the care of the Bishop of Geneva. He accepted this charge and even drew up an act to this effect. In it he promised solemnly "faithfully, carefully, and piously to serve and advance Jeanne Françoise Frémyot, his very dear spiritual daughter, in the love of God, assuming the responsibility of answering for her before the judgment seat of God." He delivered this pact to her, and to the day of her death she wore it suspended from her neck in a little locket. This contract linked the guide to the traveller. Let us see how he fulfilled his part of the agreement.

He had already conceived the project of founding the Order of the Visitation at Annecy. He knew Madame de Chantal was to be its future foundress. But an undertaking of this kind would require time. This necessary element always entered into his calculations. Never did he compromise the success of anything by undue haste or precipitation. The amazing fruitfulness of his labors was due in no small measure to his diligent and conscientious use of every minute. His life was, as I have pre-

viously observed, a miracle of balance, proportion, judgment, and harmony.

Madame de Chantal, as he did not forget, indeed he would have been the last to forget it, had certain duties to perform. She must rear and educate her four children. Indefatigably he inculcated the principle of fidelity to the duties of one's walk in life. He would wait years, if it were necessary. The period of waiting, however, proved to be much shorter than he had anticipated. At no time in his career was he tempted to force souls to attain spiritual perfection. With consummate art, he directed them to seek the perfect development of the will. To them alone he left the choice of means. "We must do all things for love and nothing out of constraint," he counselled. "We must love obedience more than we fear disobedience."

Thus little by little did Madame de Chantal slowly retire from the world of her own volition. She became worried as to whether she was not wasting too much time bewailing the loss of her husband. Did she not refer to him too often ? St Francis de Sales reassured her. She might speak without constraint of Baron de Chantal, but with an affection freed "from worldly consideration." He got her to grant her unqualified forgiveness to the man who had accidentally murdered her husband. She had previously forgiven him, but she still refused to see him. The unfortunate fellow was inconsolable. He had just been married and his happiness seemed shadowed. The Bishop was instrumental in bringing them together; he did not compel her to seek the man; he insisted, how-

ever, that she should not avoid him. "I do not require you to seek out this poor man, but you must be condescending and gracious to those who endeavor to effect a meeting for you." He knew her heart, "gentle, tender, and compassionate." She yielded. When she saw M. d'Anlezy she went, as on every previous occasion, far beyond what was expected of her. She offered to act as godmother to his child. So she lifted the burden which was crushing him, and gave him consolation in his grief. She would always have these sudden bursts of generosity, often preceded by a show of feminine weakness.

Then there is the scene at the bedside of little Jeanne de Sales, youngest sister of the Bishop and a great many years younger than he. Madame de Chantal had requested his family to confide this fourteen-year-old girl to her as a playmate for her daughter, and had taken her to her own castle at Thotes, in Burgundy. There the child became dangerously ill. Watching over the dying girl, Madame de Chantal, in despair and with an exaggerated idea of her responsibility, offered her life and even that of one of her daughters in exchange for the life so fast ebbing away. St Francis de Sales' letter on the death of his little sister is most touching. I have previously quoted it in part.

He informs Madame de Chantal, first, of the manner in which his mother received this heavy blow and accepted this sorrow. He proceeds, then, to the subject of her excessive offering. "I do not deem it praiseworthy," he adds, "that you should have offered your life or that of one of your children in exchange for the life of my

little sister. Now, my dear daughter, not only must we accept the blow when God strikes, but we must acquiesce in the manner in which God deals the blow. I fully understand your heart, strong, loving, and dominated by a powerful will. I appreciate your great-heartedness; of what use are half-dead hearts ? But, we must make a special practice of loving the Will of God more vigorously, more devotedly than anything else in this world. You have, my dear daughter, four children, a good father, a very kind brother and even a spiritual father, all of whom are very dear to your heart. Well, if God were to deprive you of all of them, would you not still possess enough in having God ?"

Does not the sublime beauty of his words awaken the imperishable ardor of Bossuet's immortal eloquence ? "Would you not still possess enough in having God ?" Once again Madame de Chantal was conquered. With characteristic ardor, once again she went further than had been expected of her and made herself repeat every morning and night: "O my Lord Jesus, my will is entirely Thine. Touch whatever cord of my lute is pleasing to Thee; forever and ever will it sound that harmony alone. Yes, Lord Jesus, fully and unreservedly may Thy will be done in my father, my children, in all things, and above all, in me." Such submission is like that of St Louis' wife, or of the physician's daughter as illustrated in the "Treatise on the Love of God."

For three years, the Bishop waited for Madame de Chantal to carry out his plans. On Pentecost, 1607, she

had gone to Annecy to see him. He sent for her after Mass. Mother de Chaugy describes the scene:

"With a countenance thoughtful and serious, his whole being bespeaking a person immersed in God, St Francis de Sales questioned Madame de Chantal:

" 'Well, my dear daughter, I have at last decided what I wish to have you do.'

" 'My Lord and Father,' she replied, 'I am fully determined to obey.' Whereupon she fell upon her knees. The Bishop did not invite her to rise.

" 'Yes,' he resumed, 'I should like you to join the Poor Clares.'

" 'I am ready to do so, Father.'

" 'Still, I fear that you are not sufficiently robust. Perhaps, you had better become a nursing sister at Beaune.'

" 'Whatever you wish, Father.'

" 'No, really, that is not my desire either. You might enter the Carmelites.'

" 'I shall be glad to follow your wishes, Father.'

"He then made various other tentative proposals to try her, but he saw that she was wax melted by divine love. Her eagerness to serve God disposed her to embrace any form of religious life that it might please him to suggest."

Was she not, indeed, "wholly absorbed in God"? This thirty-five year old widow, handsome, distinguished, the recipient of many flattering offers of marriage, had many substantial bonds to bind her to the world, but none more strong than her four children. Yet never for

an instant did she hesitate. Why? Because she knew that her spiritual father would propose to her nothing that was not just, reasonable, and pleasing to God. Like the physician's daughter, her trust was perfect.

Finding her so well disposed, St Francis de Sales explained to her his plan for the establishment of the Order of the Visitation. According to his calculations, it would take seven years before the plan could be executed, for not before then will she have fulfilled her maternal duties. With her usual impetuosity she shortened the period of waiting. In three years, she presented herself, free to carry out his design.

She lost the youngest of her three daughters by death. The oldest, Marie-Aimée, married Baron de Thorens, a brother of St Francis de Sales. The latter had nothing to do with this marriage. The Abbé Brémond is convinced that the family of our Saint was highly honored by this alliance, that the Rabutin-Chantals and the Frémyots thought they were doing a great favor in bestowing the hand of so richly dowered and so brilliantly gifted a young girl upon so unimportant a gentleman.

There again is the old idea cropping out that Savoy is a distant province, rude and uncultured. How persistently error prevails! The de Sales family was descended from a very noble and ancient lineage. And the Dukes of Savoy were of peerless rank. Nor should we forget that for a time they occupied the throne of Italy. Was it not a Nemours, a princeling from little Savoy, who set the styles for the Paris of his day, imposing on the Court his fashions and tastes? As for the difference in wealth,

that was not the first time nor will it be the last, that a young heiress has joined hands in marriage with a poor young man. Is not this the theme of Octave Feuillet's famous novel ? Did not Madame de Chantal herself build up the tottering manor house of the Rabutins with the money of the Frémyots ?

The new Baroness de Thorens afforded Ste Jeanne Françoise still another reason for taking up her abode at Annecy. There she brought her only remaining girl, Françoise familiarly called Françon. This little one was later made very happy at the Visitation for she was petted and fondled by all the nuns. "The shadow of the cross that their mother bore," Msgr Brémond has very aptly said, "was sovereignly sweet for the two daughters of Ste de Chantal." So pleasantly was Françon treated, that she did not deprive herself of the pleasure of being a coquette, especially in her mother's absence.

But, how about the son, the charming Celse-Bénigne ? The year before Madame de Chantal left Dijon to settle at Annecy, she confided him to the care of his grandfather, M. Frémyot, who was to bring him up. In those days, a young boy was not brought up by women. Recall the departure of Bayard from his father's chateau when he was probably no more than fourteen years old. His mother withdrew into one of the towers to cry her heart out. Some tender-hearted people have done Madame de Chantal a grave injustice in criticizing her for abandoning her children, but those who make this charge fail to take into account the customs of her day. Montaigne was astounded at the kissing or fondling of children. It

never occurred to his contemporaries to take him to task for this harsh attitude. Madame de Chantal had fulfilled her duties towards her children. When she decided to found the Order of the Visitation, with the help of the Bishop of Geneva, her father, who had allowed himself to be won over gradually to her project, raised not a single objection. His farewell to her, on the contrary, was most edifying.

Celse-Bénigne, we know, threw himself across the threshold of the door to prevent his mother's departure. She hesitated, murmuring, "O my God, what do You ask of me ? I am a mother." But, she stepped over this tender obstacle, weeping. No man or woman either, in those days, would have permitted so young a son to carry his point in so tender a matter, not the most affectionate mother in the world. Madame de Chantal could not abdicate her authority, but her tears spoke eloquently of the love that was in her heart. Hard-heartedness is the very last reproach that can be flung at her. The Abbé Brémond is perfectly right when he rejects such an interpretation of her action. Not a particle of sentimentality is to be found in her, although there is a certain abundance of affection that St Francis de Sales tried in vain to check.

In later years, she instructed her novices: "The spirit of God is joyous and vigorous, not weak and languishing." But she also reminded them: "Who are the weaklings that claim they dare not use words of affection ?"

She watched over her son as faithfully when she was away from him as when she had been with him. St

Francis de Sales assisted her in guiding and directing him, as we saw in that fine letter of his which begins: "Sir, you are about to set sail on the high seas of the world."

This handsome young fellow, ardent, vivacious, merry, married Marie de Coulanges, and was killed in the island of Ré fighting against the English. His wife survived him ten years. Madame de Chantal, in her convent, wept abundantly at the news of the death of her daughter-in-law, not so much for the dead as for the "poor little orphan" who was to be the good yet clever, serious yet merry Marquise de Sévigné.

Marie-Aimée, the wife of Bernard de Sales, Baron de Thorens, died before Celse-Bénigne. While crossing the Alps to rejoin the army, young Baron de Sales, whose career had started off so auspiciously, was prematurely carried off by an infectious fever. St Francis de Sales was the first to receive news of his brother's death. It, therefore, devolved upon him to tell the young widow and her mother. How he informed the bereaved ones and the edifying death in the Visitation of Madame De Chantal's daughter, I have described in an earlier chapter.

As for Françoise de Chantal, Françon, she married M. de Toulongeon, at the suggestion of her mother. To tell the truth, while M. de Toulongeon made a very good husband, he was not Madame de Chantal's first choice. She had hoped that Françoise would marry M. de Ballon, who was immensely wealthy and came of a distinguished family. He married Mademoiselle de Charmoisy. Madame de Chantal, meanwhile, had discovered M. de

Toulongeon. In a letter to Françoise announcing the visit of her suitor, Madame de Chantal writes:

"My dear daughter, M. de Toulongeon, having several days free, is going to see you to ascertain from you, he says, if you have any objections to his complexion. As for his disposition, he is sure you will like it. . . Now, I am highly pleased that this marriage has been arranged for you by your relatives and me. Good children are always docile. Your brother, whose judgment is excellent, is delighted with this arangement. M. de Toulongeon, it is true, is some fifteen years older than you. But, my dear, you will be happier with him than with some young fool, giddy and debauched, as are the young men of today. The man you will marry is above such things. He does not gamble. He has spent his life honorably at war and at Court, holding responsible offices from the King. If you refuse to receive him graciously and cordially, you will lack the good judgment I have always given you credit for possessing." The "fifteen" years were really twenty-seven. It seems to me that Madame de Chantal might have profited by reading the passage in the "Introduction to a Devout Life" in which St Francis de Sales emphasizes the necessity and importance that the girl, not her relatives, approve of the proposed husband. Françoise accepted the dark, genial, and gay M. de Toulongeon, and it turned out to be a happy marriage.

Several years later, Madame de Toulongeon was bringing her mother and Madeleine de Chaugy to Dijon. They halted in a field adjoining Autun. The superior of the community in the latter city had arranged this

meeting-place in order to render an account to Madame de Chantal of her monastery, quarantined because of small-pox. It had been understood, of course, that the two women, to avoid spreading the contagion, would converse with each other at a distance. But, this separation Ste Jeanne Françoise would not tolerate. She knelt down and prayed, then, bravely walked with a rapid step towards the amazed superior of Autun. She kissed her, then took her into her carriage, or rather, into Madame de Toulongeon's carriage. Madame de Toulongeon had with her her six-year old daughter, Gabriella. At this unexpected turn of affairs, she became quite alarmed for the safety of her only daughter. "Really, if I were not sure that my mother is a Saint," she remarked to Madeleine de Chaugy, "I should die of fear." No evil consequences, however, resulted.

These are the salient points in the biography of Madame de Chantal before the founding of the Order of the Visitation.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE, THE PATH TO GOD

AT their very first meeting St Francis de Sales had recognized the admirable spiritual qualities of Madame de Chantal. In his brilliant analysis of their holy friendship, the Abbé Brémond characterizes them as follows:

"He was slow, subtle, cautious; she was all ardor." In her case, Msgr Brémond believes, the friendship was perfect from its inception; it could only be completed in God; whereas St Francis de Sales hesitated, groped his way, not daring to make rapid strides lest he might proceed imprudently. There again, without seeking to quarrel, I cannot entirely accept the judgment of Msgr Brémond.

St Francis de Sales, I am convinced, was the guide. Upon him rested the responsibility of opening the way. A guide who does not avoid crevasse and precipice, who cannot calculate the resistance of rock and snow, is not a good guide. Then, too, his project of establishing the Order of the Visitation required prudent, cautious measures. He could not convey all his plans and hopes to Madame de Chantal in a short space of time. Even though he had complete confidence in her, he could not be absolutely certain just what to expect of her. With

his first glance he had penetrated the depths of her soul; that keen look had pierced the fleshy envelope of her soul as easily as if the body were transparent crystal. He was not mistaken. He knew. But he wished to be sure.

An artist of genius sees his whole painting in advance; but he will take long days, months and possibly years to fulfill his dream. The scientist passes beyond known problems to grapple with the unknown by means of an hypothesis. Later, he retraces his steps to join his scientific discoveries to conclusions science had already accepted. That St Francis de Sales immediately realized that Madame de Chantal was the foundress of the Order of the Visitation whom he had seen years before in a vision in the castle of Thorens, is unquestionable. Almost immediately after their meeting at Dijon, he wrote to her: "I belong to you in God; every faculty of my soul convinces me of that." But, these mysterious attractions, augmented in this case by an insight born of holiness, must be studied with the utmost circumspection. They form the basis of every great friendship, every great love. Since they transform life, they merit our serious consideration.

In the "Treatise on the Love of God," does not St Francis de Sales make it perfectly clear that we are free to choose the object of our love, that our will should dominate our selection ? But, once the choice is made, the will is exalted and magnified accordingly. When St Francis de Sales was certain that his choice was good and pleasing to God, he surrendered to it with all the tenderness of his noble heart: "This affection," he wrote to

Ste Jeanne Françoise, "is whiter than snow and purer than sunshine; that is why I have loosened the reins." Her influence over him was soothing, comforting. "This love," he wrote again, "to me is a refreshing dew, flooding my heart with a sweet peace. And if you wish me to be perfectly frank with you, I must admit that it was not so in the beginning."

Some years later, he speaks still more effusively of the bond which unites them. This friendship afforded him much consolation in his increasing round of duties, amidst the press and stress of a life unselfishly devoted to the interest of others and miraculously devoid of human repose. "I love this love beyond compare. It is strong, unbending, without limit or reserve, but milk, gentle, perfectly pure and peaceful. In short, if I am not mistaken, it is all in God and for God. Why then, should I not love it ? . . . God Who sees the inmost recesses of my heart knows there is nothing there that is not wholly His and according to His Divine Heart. I desire, with the help of His grace, never to love any creature not to be loved by anyone except in Him and through Him Who is my all. In God, therefore, I desire to keep and increase most tenderly this supreme affection of my life. . ." On another occasion, he assured her: "My daughter, you are the courage of my heart and the heart of my courage."

Did Ste Jeanne Françoise immediately benefit by this friendship ? Undoubtedly yes, because she was by nature more ardent and impetuous than St Francis de Sales.

That very ardor impelled her to attain great intimacy with God. Unfortunately, many of the letters of Madame de Chantal which would have portrayed vividly this gradual growth in holiness have been destroyed. When St Francis de Sales tested her before confiding to her his great design of founding the Visitation, he saw that her heart was ready to be consumed in the fire of Divine Love. Even at that early date, her spirituality was of a high order. Like the wife of St Louis and the physician's daughter described in the "Treatise on the Love of God," she revealed a perfect trust in God. Beyond all question she certainly inspired the beautiful pictures in Book IX of this admirable work. Her visits to the Carmelite convent at Dijon had prepared her for the mystic way of love. Not the least marvellous aspect of her soaring to God through love was her ability to focus every thought, impulse, and intuition on the Sun of her soul, God.

That St Francis de Sales saw all this distinctly and immediately, that he perceived instinctively the chains of love that were to link their souls in union with God, is stated in the testimony of Madame de Chantal before the canonization of St Francis de Sales.

"Nearly five or six years before I became a nun," she said, "I appealed to him:

" 'Monseigneur, will you never have me withdraw from the world ?' He answered with extraordinary firmness:

" 'Yes, some day you will forsake all things; you will come to me and you will embrace the perfect destitution of the Cross.'

" 'This, indeed, happened,' she added, 'and by ways so far removed from human prudence that they can be attributed to Divine Providence alone.' "

Their holy friendship was, therefore, the work of Providence. It developed in them a greater love of God, a deeper enthusiasm in His service, lacking which they would never have been so prodigal of themselves. Just as two horses, harnessed together, goad each other on to greater progress, so these two Saints, inspired by their friendship, spurred each other on to even more strenuous efforts. God was at the end of the road. He was their goal. Never has God forbidden us to choose our friends. Did not our Saviour Himself show partiality for St John, Lazarus, Martha and Mary Magdalen ? The greatest servants of God have not given their hearts to everybody impartially. "Perfection," wrote St Francis de Sales, "does not consist in having no friendships, but in having only those which are good, holy, and sacred." Indeed, the angelic Doctor, St Thomas Aquinas, classifies as a virtue a holy friendship. Such, in fine, was the friendship of St Francis de Sales and Ste Jeanne Françoise de Chantal.

It lifted them, one must remember, far above the lowlands where we dwell amid terrestrial loves and friendships to those sublime heights where silence and immobility reign, where the very air is too rarified for us poor mortals to breathe, yet whence their eyes envisaged the supernal beauty of the Beatific Vision, and their faces were warmed by the divine breath of God. "What a pleasure it is to love without fear of excess !" exultantly

sings St Francis de Sales. "Never can there be any excess when we love in God." So completely were their minds and hearts attuned to the Holy Will of God that they were truly one being, one victim entirely consumed in Him. Together they labored to offer to their God a sacrifice, the most perfect, the most complete, the gift of a "heart totally dead to all earthly vanities, completely stripped of self and lifted on high that a holocaust so sublime and holy might be pleasing in His eyes."

The most disdainful reproach that St Paul addressed to the Gentile is the stigma of "hard-hearted." Only those capable of great love, St Francis de Sales believed, are fitted to become great saints. "One must die or love," says St John, "for he who does not love, dwells in death."

CHAPTER V

THE SUPREME RENUNCIATION

AS, LITTLE by little, these two Saints accomplished the sacrifice which was to transform their love in God to love of God, the story becomes so sublime that it is almost impossible to narrate it. "He was not dependent," wrote Ste Jeanne Françoise of St Francis de Sales, "on life or death, relatives or friends. He soared beyond such." In a word, he was detached from all terrestrial affections, living in that blessed state of contented expectancy in which the soul yearns for God. This condition he himself has beautifully described in his "Treatise on the Love of God." He was detached, yes, but not from this spiritual friendship, so inspiring and consoling. Did not this love lighten the heavy burden of his many duties, comforting and directing souls, establishing monasteries, developing missionary activities and the countless other tasks that devolved upon him ? In his prodigious labor did he not need comfort to sweeten his toil, strength to overcome fatigue, and energy to sustain him on the thorny path he had to tread, a path that led to heights well-nigh inaccessible ?

In this holy affection which united them, Madame de Chantal found, perhaps to an even greater degree, the added strength and inspiration required of her by her

prayers and the hardships attendant upon establishing a religious community. But, St Francis de Sales asked her, in fact, commanded her to give up this one great consolation, their love for each other. The Abbé Brémond thinks the sacrifice was harder for her than for him. On the other hand, I am inclined to believe that they both suffered equally; that is to say, willingly and cheerfully, they offered to God this last drop of their heart's blood. So fully had their love found consummation in Him that human suffering lifted them out of and beyond themselves.

He had been sick. She was worried. He seized this opportune moment to secure her pledge of a total renunciation of all human affection. He directed her, therefore, to make this oblation:

"I am willing, O my God, that Thou shouldst draw my heart from all things created. My God, I expect nothing. Withdraw me even from myself. O self, I abandon you forever."

She received this request, appalled. Was this required? Must she relinquish all, the love which had bound them together, him too? For this *self* which he counselled her to abandon, of it he was a part. But, in her heart the burning flame of God's love achieved this supreme renunciation. With that splendid violence of decision which was her dominant characteristic, she submitted her will to his. Thereafter, she remained untrammelled by earthly ties. She even obliged herself to change her manner of speech. Both St Francis de Sales and she were in the habit of speaking of "our"

mind and "our" heart. She now resumed the your which they had discarded as an insufficient sign of their close union. This time, however, she is following her guide, not preceding him.

As the Abbé Brémond so aptly says, "She stretched herself out on the cross with regal simplicity, devoid even of pride." Gently, as if he were crowning her with a bridal wreath, did St Francis de Sales place on her head a crown of thorns. "No longer must you think," he wrote to her, "of our friendship, nor of the intimate union which has united us in God, nor of your children, your body, your soul, nor anything whatsoever. All these you have given to God. Clothe yourself with Christ Crucified. When you have a duty to perform, a task to accomplish, do not do it through inclination, but solely because for you it is the will of God." Their flawless friendship, their perfect love was proved in their renunciation of it. Ste Jeanne de Chantal, every inch his equal when it was a question of an ardent love of God, thoroughly comprehended his teaching on this point.

In anticipation, she braced herself to bear this last yoke: "Alas ! my dear Father, in spirit I hear you commanding me to despoil my soul of self, of all earthly dross in the fire of renunciation. Oh ! my God ! How easy it is to leave the trifles that surround us ! But to abandon one's very self, flesh and blood and bones, and to penetrate into the very depths of one's being, which, it seems to me, is what we have done — this is a difficult thing, yes and impossible, except for the grace of God."

One can almost hear the shattering of the vase which

liberates the exquisite perfume of their love. "It seems to me," she sighed after she had thrown off the shackles of earth, "that I can see the two parts of our being united, brought together again in God forevermore."

This secret drama, luminous, sorrowful, sacred, was enacted on the high summit of their souls. Outside these holy precincts nothing transpired. Nothing save a redoubling of fervor and activity by both. More and more did his eager spirit heap burdens upon his already weighted shoulders until, from sheer exhaustion, he sank under this load in the fulness of his vigor. Ste Jeanne Françoise displayed a similar progress in virtue and love. Both as a nun and as foundress of a religious congregation, she exhibited unostentatiously an increase in every sterling virtue that reveals a close, personal union with the Virgin Spouse of souls.

In the letters of St Francis de Sales one notes from time to time a particular, individual note which stresses the reality of their friendship in God. Two or three times before his death, he again recommended her to die to self that she might live wholly for God: "Live entirely in the life and death of Him Who lived to teach us how to die to ourselves, and Who died to teach us how to live for Him." But, on another occasion, he gives her a last tender word: "You will never know, perhaps, all that I am to you, so fully has God made me yours." And the year preceding his death, he wrote her: "I greet your heart with all of mine which is most perfectly and irrevocably yours in Christ Jesus, our only Love."

When, in December 1622, he went to Lyons where he

was to die, she paid him a visit. Although he was her spiritual director, she had not seen him for several years. Joyously she went to him, glad of the opportunity to discourse with him about her soul. But he requested her to speak to him about the Visitation. As his time was limited, she had to leave him without having confided to him her doubts and anxieties. A few days later, when she was in Belley, she learned of his death.

"I fell on my knees," she wrote to Mother Jacqueline Favre, "and adored Divine Providence, embracing as best I could the Holy Will of God and my incomparable affliction. I wept abundantly the remainder of the day, but very gently. With great peace and tranquillity I accepted God's will for I knew the glory his blessed soul was enjoying. . . After Holy Communion, I pursued my ordinary duties, but I frankly admit that, not a day or half a day has passed in which I have not shed tears and in abundance. My heart is greatly grieved though at peace. I do not fail, however, to accomplish all I should."

Even in death she obeyed him. She was faithful and exact in the performance of every obligation of her state in life. She accepted the heavy blow and thanked God; she did not lose her peace of mind. But, woman-like she wept, and we love her the more for it, we whose hearts, like his and like hers, are human, yet who have not, like them, offered them completely to God.

St Francis de Sales and Ste Jeanne Françoise de Chantal, you experienced a chaste and holy love in God. Cheerfully, you willed to transform it by sacrifice into divine

love. After having followed you from afar on the mountain tops of sublime endeavor, will you not pardon me now for descending into the lowlands where the ugly combat of sordid passion rages ? As the pure mountain streams quench the wanderer's thirst, so may your noble example of renunciation comfort the bruised hearts of those who, forcing themselves to forego earthly happiness because it conflicts with the Divine Law, are toiling along their Way of the Cross ! May your heroic sacrifice strengthen them as they struggle on, striving not to falter by the wayside or slacken their pace !

Poor, indeed, is our judgment when we interpret human love as a mere seeking after sensual satisfaction. It can be, in fact it is, a bond of union between two souls of similar tastes, who are irresistibly attracted to each other, one of whom is a necessary complement to the other. Without some intervention from on high, can a poor, weak mortal sufficiently overcome human weakness to sever this bond ? Who will dare to estimate the secret, silent tragedies that are whispered to the lonely Sentinel in our tabernacles, or perhaps, buried in the hubbub of daily life, even in the midst of worldly festivities ? How many women and young girls bear a wound in their breasts, like wounded doves whose white feathers show a spot of blood ? How many men too, although their virtue is rarer, have had to choose the bitter instead of the sweet ? Ste Jeanne Françoise and St Francis de Sales, obtain for them the solace you found in adoring the Divine Will. They appeal to you; will you not hear them ? They lift supplicating voices in prayer. Like

the Abbé Henri Perreyve, who addressed the one Woman above all women, the Immaculate Mother of God, they plead:

"Gentle Mother of all mankind, have pity on all who have been separated from those they love. Have pity on the lonely, the friendless! Pardon the weakness of our faith! Have pity on all who are dear to us. O Holy Mother, show a mother's campassion to the sorrowful, to those who pray, to all who tremble under life's burdens. Grant them hope and peace. . ." Let us not be deceived. Many that go their way in life firmly and faithfully, with honesty and uprightness, have tasted the bitterness and ignominy of weakness, weariness, temptation, and the all-consuming thirst for love.

In Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," Orsino, Duke of Illyria, tries to distract a despairing lover with music: "If music is the food of love," bemoans this unfortunate fellow, "play on unceasingly; give it to me to excess, that my devouring passion may fall ill of it and expire."

Nineteen years after the death of St Francis de Sales, Ste Jeanne Françoise de Chantal lay on her death-bed. She asked one of her nuns to be kind enough to read to her a few pages from the ninth book (I almost said the ninth Canticle) of the "Treatise on the Love of God." Calmly, she waited the end, her soul filled with hope. She, too, required a music that would be the food of her divine love. She knew where it would be found. I trust that the nun whom she invited to read selected this passage:

"One of the most excellent musicians in the universe, a

marvellous flute player, in a short time became extremely deaf. He did not, however, abandon his music on this account. In spite of his handicap he continued his playing and singing although he could not hear a note. His music no longer afforded him any pleasure. He played and sang only for a prince to whom he was indebted for much care and kindness. The musician was rewarded for his efforts when his prince manifested the least sign of enjoyment at the exquisite melodies he drew from his instrument. But, it often happened that the prince, to test the devotion of his loyal follower, would ask him to play and sing. Then, suddenly, he would leave him to go hunting. So intense, however, was the singer's desire to please his master and to carry out his wishes that he would continue his music as carefully as if the prince were present. His deafness deprived him of any pleasure in his own performance, and he had not even the happiness of knowing that the one he loved was listening."

Did not St Francis de Sales exhort her to pour forth whole-heartedly and unstintingly the magnificent rhythm of her song of love, not to satisfy him but to please her eternal Lover, God ?

CHAPTER VI

THE CROSS

ONE DAY, last autumn, I climbed to the summit of the Semnoz mountains which overlook Lake Annecy. It was one of those misty, uncertain days when you are sure that somewhere higher up the sun must be shining. But how far, you wonder, must you climb to meet its gleaming rays ? Masses of thick, fleecy clouds trailed along the mountain sides. Fir trees, their branches dripping with moss, surrounded me on every side. Then suddenly stepping out of the fog which enveloped me, I stood drenched in brilliant sunshine. The mountain top was in sight, a bare, sloping meadow, crowned by a cross.

Unlike many of his fellow-men, who wrapped themselves in the self-satisfied security of the vague, hazy joys of this world, St Francis de Sales toiled painfully up the steep, rugged mountain of Christian perfection, its slopes despoiled of all semblance to life, and at the summit Calvary awaited him. Once, when Madame de Chantal was in imminent danger of death, he wrote to her: "Lay your head at the foot of the Cross and keep it there, humbly confident that you will receive the merits of the Precious Blood that flows therefrom."

Calvary was their sacred meeting-place. To its lofty heights they pointed the way.

MEDITATION

HOW FAR removed we are from the insipid St Francis de Sales depicted by so many of his commentators ! When I reproached most amicably and perhaps unjustly, my learned confrère, the Abbé Brémond, for not having emphasized the Saint's strength of character in his "History of Religious Sentiment," he replied with that picturesque animation which lends so much charm to his conversation:

"Why yes indeed, I agree with you in regard to the virile strength of St Francis de Sales. As a Doctor of the Church, he is magnificently firm, much more robust than Bossuet. He always knew exactly what he wanted; he never displayed the least vacillation or hesitancy. But I believe in continual progress. Early in life he formed a methodical habit of reducing everything to first principles. He had a horror for the abstract, he observed, observed unceasingly, correcting himself and enriching both his knowledge and experience. This progress, gradual but distinct, can be traced from the 'Introduction to a Devout Life' to the 'Treatise on the Love of God.' When he wrote the 'Introduction' he was still very much attached to the teaching of the Jesuits. In the 'Treatise,' which is primarily addressed to souls more advanced in perfection, he is much more mystical. He is less care-

ful in studying and analyzing every action. He does not follow a set form of meditation.

"I wrote and I still believe, that Ste Jeanne de Chantal and the Carmelites of Dijon were largely instrumental in effecting this progress or evolution. But — I speak with all reverence — their role was a minor one, comparable to the part played by sheep and chickens in the progress of Pasteur's work. Leaning strongly towards mysticism, although at the time he never even suspected this tendency, he saw that the works and methods of St Ignatius might disturb certain souls. He wondered if the Carmelites at Dijon were not in the right when they recommended a simple form of prayer. Ste Chantal never taught him anything, but he studied her life. Her influence on him was as passive as that of a landscape on a painter. Always did he keep the lion's part, the man's share. Never did he fail to dominate. With this knowledge clearly in view, I believe that our Saint represented himself truly when he said that his will was not 'strong.' In the petty trifles of life, in the affairs of no moment, he was exceedingly pliant and gracious. His brother John and his valet easily prevailed over him. He could not, or rather, would not if he could, defend himself against this tryanny. All of this, however, is not contrary to the real strength of character which you, very correctly, have stressed."

His singular patience and tenderness in guiding souls along spiritual lines has not always been understood. In an essay, keen, forceful and erudite, dedicated to our Saint, M. Fortunat Strowski concludes that his direction

rendered those who followed it peculiarly incompetent in the practical affairs of life. To support his assertion, he cites the example of the little Duke of Burgundy. Fénelon trained him according to the methods used by St Francis de Sales. When put in command of an army, he was incapable of anything except watching over and preserving his piety. What pity, on the contrary, this unfortunate prince would have aroused in St Francis de Sales ! And how quickly he would have set this young man on the right path ! St Francis de Sales, in word and deed, preached the doctrine that fidelity to the duties of our state in life is one of the fundamental principles of the spiritual life. When he died, Madame de Chantal, to whom he bequeathed his spirit, *pursued her ordinary round of duties*. The greatest grief should not cause us to lose our mastery over self, nor should it paralyze our activity.

St Francis de Sales steered a middle course between the Jansenists and the Molinists. He had that infinitely rare and precious possession, moral equilibrium. Far from neglecting realities to trifle with vain fancies, he assimilated both the intention and the act, soul and body, as it were, without either of which life is impossible. M. Maurice Barrès, in his "Enquête aux pays du levant," has found delight in studying the occult doctrine of the Ishmaelites. Is he not always attracted by the pot where witches brew their love potions and concoct their sorceries ? "The heart must be united to God," is the doctrine propounded by Hassan and termed the *renovation,* "and the soul must always turn towards the Divinity,

for this is true prayer. The Great Master must be obeyed. As for rules, laws, customs, they no longer exist. . . I suppress sin. . ." Persia, land of secret sciences ! Like all religions, this too comes out of Asia, whence it has passed on to the Western World. After it had been toned down, softened, and rendered more complicated, it became the quietism of Madame Guyon. But not the slightest trace of this taint can be detected in St Francis de Sales.

It is not difficult to perceive what separated him from Port-Royal. The great Arnaud, the most notable exponent of the teachings of Jansenius, says in his "Discourse on the Reformation of the Interior Man": "You will experience in Divine Love a portion of the joy that passion seeks to borrow from vile and perishable pleasures. For passion only desires grandeur, knowledge, and satisfaction. Is there anything so sublime as this love by which the soul, dissipating the darkness enshrouding everything created, and submitting itself to Him Who is the Principle of greatness and glory, elevates itself in the pure, calm light of eternity to a point where it scorns all earthly things as beneath its notice and unworthy of its affection ?" The very tone of this passage, haughty and scornful, a proclamation of the unworthiness of all human affection, is so opposed to the spirit of St Francis de Sales. Pride is there, ever alert to seize upon minds purified of passions which are common to mankind. Even when St Francis de Sales had attained to sublime heights of sanctity, he never lost his human qualities. And it is our human heart that he urges us to offer to God.

In the perfection he sought there was a sane balance between the lofty reasoning of St Thomas Aquinas and an intense capacity for sympathy and commiseration for the weakness of human nature. Following in the footsteps of St Francis de Sales will lend charm, color, and grandeur to our lives.

Towering above the Castle of Nemours, on Mount la Puyat, one of the low peaks of the Semnoz mountains, the convent of the Order of the Visitation overlooks Annecy and one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. The sapphire waters of Lake Annecy wind in and out among its flower-laden banks. Vineyards on innumerable terraces, thriving meadows, gay with every variety of vegetable, and gaunt pasture lands tempt the eye to linger long over nature's lavish feast. Haughtily oblivious of the regal splendor at their feet, tall, jagged, austere peaks, aflame with a thousand fires from the setting sun, rise in unconscious majesty above a truly majestic scene. On that height, in the crypt of the monastery repose the mortal remains of St Francis de Sales and Ste Jeanne de Chantal; she, at the right of the altar, clothed in the religious costume generally worn by widows, holding in her hands her rosary, crucifix, and prayerbook; he, at the left, white and gold in all the beauty of his episcopal robes. On every side, they are surrounded by sweetness and ruggedness. But sweetness is dominant.

How many times have I gone there, but above all, in autumn, when all Savoy is one marvellous bouquet of

glory! The lake, then, is shivering in its first contact with frost. The gleaming blue of its waters is shifting to the pale green of aquamarine. Like a river of gold the plane trees of Paquier Lane join the city to the road to Albigny. A misty haze, interwoven with threads of mauve and gold, a transparent scarf of fragile, shimmering beauty, enfolds the rocky and wooded slopes of the mountains, but aloft, their heads are proudly crowned with the dazzling whiteness of early snows. All nature sings in this charming spot. Yet close to the monastery hill, it seems to pray.

How often, when there, have I thought of asking St Francis de Sales to obtain for me the grace to make a good use of my life! And always has the afterthought come that, from his heart there burst forth a miraculous flame like the burning bush! If I knew how to compose a prayer and if I dared — but this daring and this knowledge, are they not beyond the power of a worldling? — this appeal would I make to him:

"Glorious St Francis de Sales, you excelled in ordering with ardor and exactitude your exterior and interior life. Grant to us, your suppliants, the vigor and energy necessary to fill every moment of our lives with a just employment, strength of will to be faithful to it, discernment to solve its problems and enthusiasm to vivify it. In spite of the vicissitudes of daily life and the changing moods of human nature, enable us to develop our true personality and attain to perfection in our states of life.

"You who feared above all other evils, indifference, lukewarmness and sadness, obtain for us a joyful love for

the commonplace things, which, for the most part, fill our lives. Teach us to relish the countless inanities which are so often productive of monotony and disgust.

"Your understanding heart lavished so much mercy and sympathy on the petty misfortunes of your correspondents. You listened with unvarying patience to their trivial complaints. Will you not, then, lift the burdens from the shoulders of innumerable weak, nervous, delicate women who render their lives one long torture by their scruples and worries, lives which, today, are far more painful than in past centuries because of economic conditions ? Will you not communicate, at least, a part of their surplus conscientiousness and anxiety to serve God to all the rude, uncivil men who so thoughtlessly and constantly oppress them ?

"You, dear St Francis de Sales, who divined the supreme, potent attraction of love, sweeten and enrich with tenderness, we implore you, all those who are united by the bonds of matrimony. Teach them that the very love they cherish for one another is threatened by monotony, that it can only be preserved at the cost of unceasing vigilance and a constant effort to increase it.

"Gentle Saint, you so perfectly understood the weakness of our poor human nature and its restless quest for happiness. Deliver, we beseech you, from their chains, whether light or heavy, all who have strayed away from the Royal Road of the Holy Cross to the broad highway of their passions. Lead them by your wondrous doctrine of love to accept the purifying and ennobling sorrow that is the bitter fruit of breaking old habits of sin.

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